

# THE REVELATION

to

ST. JOHN

## The New Testament Apocalypse



by

**Roland Kleger**

Kreuzlingen, May 2022

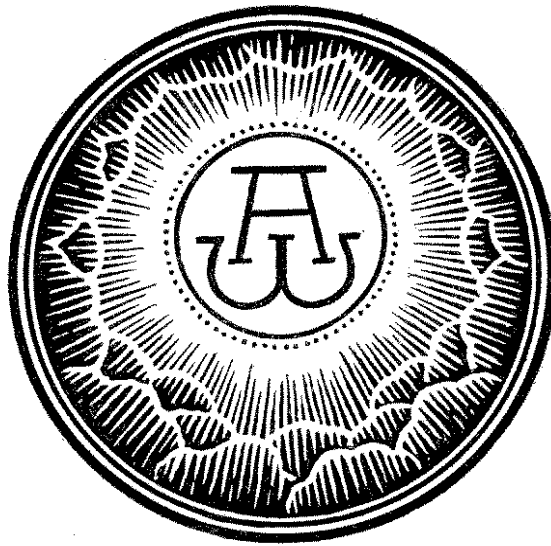
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*“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Yes, Amen! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, says the Lord, the one who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty.” Rev 1:7-8*

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## 5 I. Introductory Questions

### A. Date of Writing and Author of Revelation

#### 1. General

10 The title of the last book of the Bible is "*Revelation of Jesus Christ*" (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). It is a revelation (literally: *unveiling*), which God the Father gave to his Son to show to his servants (1:1). The title of the book "*Revelation by John*" is a traditional term used since early times and it served not least to distinguish the book from various other (extracanonial) apocalyptic writings. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century the word *Saint* was added to the name of the author: *Revelation by Saint John*.

#### 2. Authorship and time of writing of Revelation

15 In the course of church-history commentators have come up with various hypotheses as to the date of writing as well as to its authorship.

##### a.) Revelation – written by the apostle John during the reign of Nero

20 This would mean between 68 and 70 AD. Based on a statement of Papias (ca. 70-155) commentators of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Westcott and Lightfoot) thought that Nero or his successor Vespasian was responsible for the imprisonment of the apostle John on the isle of Patmos. In this case Revelation would have been written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem (by Titus in the year 70). This date is also suggested by the well-known early church fathers: Clemens of Alexandria, Origen and Jerome (Hieronymus). They saw in the term "beast" (e.g. chapter 17) an allusion to the emperor Nero.

##### 25 b.) Revelation – written towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century by a bishop (or elder) with the name of John

30 Certain exegetes doubt that John the apostle was still alive by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Denis of Alexandria (disciple of Origen, middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century) for instance denied the authorship of Revelation by John the apostle, because he did not believe in a literal millennium.<sup>1</sup> He attributed Revelation to another John, who is supposed to be buried in Ephesus next to the apostle John. Eusebius (270-340) and other theologians of the Eastern Church followed this line and spoke of "John the Elder – bishop of Ephesus".

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<sup>1</sup> *Millennium* in our context refers to the so-called *reign of 1000 years* (Rev 20:1ff). Compare: *chiliasm* – derived from the Greek χίλιοι (*chilioi*) = 1000.

## 5 c.) Revelation – written by the apostle John towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century

Most exegetes of the early church attributed Revelation to the apostle John. Irenaeus (of Lyon) and Justin Martyr relate that the apostle John returned after his imprisonment on the isle of Patmos to Ephesus and that he lived until the reign of Trajan (i.e. until 98). So the writing of Revelation should be placed around 95 AD. Starting at that time there was a fierce persecution of Christians under Domitian (who was therefore called a *second Nero*). Domitian was a cruel despot. It is told that he had arrested and convicted John to forced labour on the isle of Patmos to intimidate the Christians. During his time in exile John received this last revelation of Christ. The church fathers Tertullian and Hippolytus are regarded as important witnesses to the authorship of Revelation by the apostle John.

## B. The Canonicity of Revelation

Justin Martyr (ca. 160) and Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 180) confirm the authorship of the book of Revelation by the apostle John quoting repeatedly from the book. Also Clemens of Alexandria (ca. 220), Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 210), Hyppolitus (ca. 240) and Origen (ca. 250) attribute Revelation to John the apostle. The Muratori-Canon<sup>2</sup> confirms that the church by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century recognised Revelation to be canonical. In the course of the history of the church the book of Revelation was again and again a cause of contention and a stumbling block for commentators.

The protestant reformers also speak of their difficulty with the book of Revelation. Erasmus of Rotterdam, Luther and Zwingli attributed Revelation to post-apostolic times. Joseph Salinger, a critic of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, congratulated John Calvin that he had written a commentary to every book of the Bible – except Revelation. Liberal Theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who question the authority of Scripture in the first place, of course criticise Revelation.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the book was discredited rather because it is supposed to be *swamped with symbols*. All this does not change the fact that Revelation is definitely included in the scripture-canon and regarded as belonging to the Holy Scripture by the early Church Fathers.

## C. Different methods of exposition

Distinguishing basically between four methods or approaches of interpretation, it needs to be said that there are further nuances within the different schools of expositors. There are also commentators who advise a combination of approaches. Following is a short summary of the four approaches or methods:

### 1. The *allegorical* approach

Supporters of this method understand Revelation by John as a kind of allegory, in which the powers of good and evil confront each other. Everything has a spiritual meaning (method of spiritualising). This method is based on a mystic-allegorical understanding of most of the book – everything is supposed to have a symbolic meaning. This method was mainly represented by the

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<sup>2</sup> This fragment was found in the year 1740 in the library *Ambrosiana* in Milan by an Italian named Muratori – hence the name *Muratori*.

5 ‘Alexandrians’ Clemens of Alexandria and Origen as well as Augustine and Hieronymus. Especially since the time of Augustine, followers of this interpretation-method understand the events in the book of Revelation as conflict and fight between the church and evil during the age of the church. The book should encourage believers, who are suffering, to walk faithfully despite temptation and persecution. By this method the strong prophetic character of the book is not  
10 recognised. In our opinion this method does not do justice to the centrality of the return of Christ and the events which follow his return.

## 2. The *preterit* approach

*Preterit* is derived from the Latin word *praeter* and means:<sup>3</sup> *past, bygone*. Representatives of this method regard that the events recorded in this book were fulfilled before the time of Emperor  
15 Constantine IV.<sup>4</sup> This means that these chapters are understood to refer to the conflict between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire. Followers of this ‘historic’ method of interpretation fell again and again into the mistake of identifying the apocalyptic persons and events with rulers and happenings of their times. The eschatological character of the book – sometimes with exception of chapters 21–22 – was totally neglected. For supporters of this method the book of Revelation has,  
20 for readers of later centuries, only didactical value.

## 3. The *present or historic continuous* approach

Representatives of this method of interpretation think that Revelation encompasses the whole span of church-history from the time of John the Baptist until the end of the world. The method was applied by Wycliffe, Luther and Bengel. They refer many passages (e.g. concerning the great  
25 prostitute of Babylon) to Rome and the papacy. The same objections against the two previous positions apply also against this method. With this method events and persons of Revelation are not brought into relation with the rest of biblical prophecy, which results in the fact that details of many passages are not sufficiently explained.

## 4. The *futuristic* approach

30 Most representatives of this method regard the words of Rev 1:19 as the “key of interpretation” and envision the events of chapters 4–22 as still lying in the future. They cite passages from the Old (e.g. Isa 2; 4; 24–27; 35; 60–62; Eze 37–48; Zec 14 etc.) and the New (Mat 24; Mar 13; Luk 21; Rom 11:25-27; 2Th 2 etc.) Testament. Using the hermeneutic principle of literal interpretation with this book one reaches the conclusion that the events related in chapters 4–22 are still in the future.  
35 The followers of this method agree that chapters 4–22 refer to the end times, whereas in relation to understanding and exegesis of the seven churches in chapters 2–3, three positions need to be differentiated.<sup>5</sup>

40 1. The seven letters describe only the condition of the seven listed 1<sup>st</sup> century local churches of the time of John the apostle.

<sup>3</sup> In grammar the so-called *Preterit* refers to the past tense.

<sup>4</sup> The first Christian emperor; one speaks of the Christian or constantinian change or turning at 312 AD, when the church became more and more a state-church.

<sup>5</sup> We do not deny that in the book of Revelation many words and pictures have a symbolic meaning: e.g. the seven horns symbolise omnipotence, the seven eyes symbolise omniscience, the lamb symbolises Christ, whereas in contrast the beast symbolises the Antichrist.

- 5     2. The seven letters give an overview of Christianity on earth regardless of time. The conditions described in these letters have existed, at least partially, at all times in the history of the church. There may be a parallel between the seven letters and the seven parables in Mat 13.
- 10    3. The seven letters constitute a prophetic vision throughout the whole history of the church, where each letter describes and characterises one of seven periods of history.

With this third view the seven epochs are basically (between commentators there may be little differences and nuances) divided as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- 15    1. **Ephesus:** The church of the 1<sup>st</sup> century is generally praiseworthy but has to face the accusation of having left the first love to the Lord. Therefore: **Ephesus, the church lacking love.**
2. **Smyrna:** From the 1<sup>st</sup> until the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the church suffered under persecution from the Roman Empire. Therefore: **Smyrna, the persecuted church.**
- 20    3. **Pergamum:** Since the time of Emperor Constantine, beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity was recognised as an official religion. Therefore: **Pergamum, the tolerant church.**
4. **Thyatira:** From the 6<sup>th</sup> until the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Roman Catholic Church took an increasing position of pre-eminence and power in the western part of the Empire. In the East the same was true for the Orthodox Church since the schism. Therefore: **Thyatira, the compromising church.**
- 25    5. **Sardis:** The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century formed the so-called period of post-reformation. The light shining during the reformation soon became dim and dark again. Therefore: **Sardis, the sleeping church.**
6. **Philadelphia:** The 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were marked by revival and mission movements (e.g. John Wesley, William Carey, Moravians, etc.). Therefore: **Philadelphia, the missionary church.**
- 30    7. **Laodicea:** The church of the end-time is characterised by apostasy and as being lukewarm. It is the church of liberalism and ecumenism. Therefore: **Laodicea, the lukewarm church.**

35    The writer of this commentary is not convinced of this third method of interpretation where the seven churches should represent seven epochs of the history of the church. We rather prefer to a combination of methods one and two,<sup>7</sup> i.e. the letters are addressed to seven actual historic churches, while these are at the same time representative and typical for all (kinds of) churches in the history of the church starting from Pentecost until the rapture.

## D. The goal of the book

- 40    Revelation was in the first place an encouragement to the churches in Asia-Minor (today: Turkey) to remain steadfast in their faith despite the raging persecution. The book of Revelation gives an answer to the problems of the suffering church: The kingdom of God will one day take the place of all the earthly kingdoms, i.e. Christ and those who belong to him shall be victorious.<sup>8</sup> Blessed is he who does not move from his confidence in the final victory of God and his Son Jesus Christ. Last

<sup>6</sup> Compare the comments of expositors like William McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*. New Testament, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. 1171 and John F. Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*. New Testament edition, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ([Wheaton, Illinois]: Victor Books, Scripture Press Publications, 1983), pp. 932-933.

<sup>7</sup> Compare with John F. Walvoord, op. cit., p. 933: "After all, these churches all existed simultaneously in the first century. . . . In general these letters to the seven churches address the problems inherent in churches throughout church history and are an incisive and comprehensive revelation of how Christ evaluates local churches."

<sup>8</sup> Compare the same message in Daniel chapters 2 and 7. In chapter 2 it is the rock that fills the whole earth and in chapter 7 the son of man who comes with the clouds.

- 5 but not least, Revelation shows how all prophecy of the Old Testament, as well as the words of Jesus and his apostles, come to their fulfilment. These truths were not only meant for the seven specified churches of Asia Minor in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they apply ultimately to the whole church of Jesus Christ at all times until his return.

## E. The person of Christ in Revelation

- 10 Revelation unveils for us the person of Jesus Christ more than any other book of Holy Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Here are some descriptions of the exalted Christ in this book:

### 1. Christ in his Humanity

- The Son of Man 1:13
- The Lion of Judah 5:5
- 15 • The Root of David 5:5

### 2. Christ in his Divinity

- The Beginning of the Creation by God 3:14
- The Alpha and Omega (i.e. the beginning and the end<sup>10</sup>) 1:8
- The First and the Last 1:17; 2:8
- 20 • The Son of God 2:18
- The LORD God 1:8
- The Christ (= the anointed one) 11:15; 12:10
- The Almighty 1:8; 4:8
- The Holy One 3:7
- 25 • The Truth 3:7; 19:11
- The *Amen* 3:14

### 3. Christ in his work of Salvation

- The one who loves us 1:5
- The one who lives eternally 1:18
- 30 • The one who died and rose again to life 1:18; 2:8

### 4. Christ in his Return

- He who comes (soon) 1:7; 22:7.12
- The bright morning-star 22:16
- The Lord God Almighty reigns 19:6 (comp. 20:4)

<sup>9</sup> The four gospels tell of the person and work of Jesus Christ from his incarnation until his ascension. The letter to the Hebrews is sometimes called the "fifth gospel" because the superiority of the person and work of Christ is described in it, especially the high-priestly ministry of Christ in heaven. In Revelation the person and work of Christ are described with many names and pictures; these serve to characterise him. He is seen as creator of all things as well as saviour and judge and Lord.

<sup>10</sup> In the Greek alphabet *Alpha* is the first and *Omega* the last letter.

## 5. Christ as Judge

- He who has the keys of death and Hades 1:18
- Out of his mouth comes a sharp and double-edged sword 1:16; 19:15
- Whose eyes are like blazing fire (nothing escapes him) 2:18; 19:12 (Heb 4:13)
- Who searches hearts and minds 2:23
- 10 • His judgements are true and just 19:2
- The witnesses: the heavenly books 20:12
- The standard: his commandments 22:7
- The proof: our works 22:12

## 6. Christ and his Church

- 15 • He holds her in his right hand 1:16; 2:1
- He walks in her midst 2:1
- He fights on the side of the believers 17:14
- He is her true witness 3:14

## 7. Christ in his relationship to the World

- 20 • The ruler of the kings of the earth 1:5; 17:14
- Lord of lords and King of kings 17:14; 19:16

## F. Key-word and key-verse of Revelation

Key-word: Fulfilment  
 Key-verse: 1:8: *I am the Alpha and the Omega...*

## 25 G. The Beatitudes in Revelation

1. *Blessed is he who reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (1:3)*
2. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them." (14:13)*
- 30 3. *Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. (16:15)*
4. *Blessed are those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. (19:9)*
5. *Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (20:6)*
- 35 6. *Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book. (22:7)*
7. *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (22:14)*



## 5 H. The “7” in Revelation

1. The 7 Churches (1:4.11.20; 2:1–3:22)
2. The 7 Spirits (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)
3. The 7 Lampstands (1:12.13.20; 2:1)
4. The 7 Stars (1:16.20; 2:1; 3:1)
- 10 5. The 7 Lamps (4:5)
6. The 7 Horns of the Lamb (5:6)
7. The 7 Eyes of the Lamb (5:6)
8. The 7 Seals (6:1–8:1)
9. The 7 Trumpets (8:2–11:19)
- 15 10. The 7 Angels (8:2.6; 15:1.6.7.8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9)
11. The 7 Thunders (10:3.4)
12. The 7 Heads of the dragon and the beast (12:3; 13:1; 17:3.7.9)
13. The 7 Crowns of the dragon (12:3)
14. The 7 Plagues (15:1.6.8; 21:9)
- 20 15. The 7 Bowls (15:7; 17:1; 21:9)
16. The 7 Hills (17:9)
17. The 7 Kings (17:10.11)

## I. Parallels between Genesis and Revelation

25 Between the first and the last book of Holy Scripture there are striking parallels. Genesis is the book of the beginnings<sup>11</sup> whereas Revelation (*Apocalypse* = *unveiling*) is the book of consummation. In the following some analogies and/or contrasts:

- Genesis starts with the creation of the universe (Gen 1). Revelation concludes with the disappearance of the old (20:11) and the creation of the new heaven and earth (21:1ff).
- 30 • The serpent (Satan) deceived the first humans whereupon they were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). Satan, the old serpent is expelled from heaven to the earth (Rev 12) and finally judged and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).
- Because of their sin the first humans were not allowed to eat of the tree of life (Gen 2:9) and were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:22-24). In the New Jerusalem the redeemed are
- 35 allowed to eat of the tree of life (Rev 22:2) and nothing unclean will be able to enter there (Rev 21:27), the serpent shall have no access.
- In Genesis sin and the curse have their beginning (Gen 3), in the new creation there will no longer be any curse (Rev 22:3).
- In Genesis we read of the beginning of death (Gen 3:19; Gen. 4: *Abel*), in Revelation it is said
- 40 that in the new creation death will be no more (Rev 21:4).
- Here man is driven away from the presence of God (Gen 3:22-24), there in the new creation he will see God face to face (Rev 22:4).
- Methuselah became, according to Gen 5:27, almost 1000 years old (969 years). In the reign of a thousand years (Rev 20:1ff) man can become 1000 years old (comp. Isa 65:20-22; Zec 8:4).
- 45 • Here is the beginning of Babylon (Gen 10:10) and connected with it man's rebellion against God (Gen 11:1ff), there is the destruction of Babylon (Rev 17:1–19:3).

<sup>11</sup> The word comes from the Greek and means *birth* or *origin* (comp. Mat 1:1.18; Jam 1:23; 3:6). Later the word *Genesis* was also used in Latin, meaning *creation*.

- 5 • In Genesis man lost his calling to reign over the earth, in Revelation it is said that the redeemed will reign with Christ eternally (Rev 5:10; 20:4.6; 22:5).

## J. The Structure of the Book

A detailed index can be found at the end of this work. Beforehand it shall be said, that a number of Commentaries divide the book into three parts on the basis of Rev 1:19 (again confirmed in 4:1):

10

1. The things you have seen: Chapter 1
2. The things which are: Chapters 2–3
3. The things which are to take place: Chapters 4–22

15

The following characteristic is to be noticed: Some descriptions of the Lord from chapter 1 are repeated in the letters of chapters 2–3 and again in the chapters 4–22. Example: The sword that comes out of his mouth is mentioned in 1:16 as well as in 2:12 and 19:15.

## 5 II. Commentary

### A. What you have seen: Prologue and Christophany: Chapter 1

#### 1. Prologue: Vv 1-3

10 **Vv 1-2:** “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him...*”: Compare this with Mat 24:36 and Mar 13:32. During the time of his earthly life Jesus laid aside certain privileges, even though he was and is the Son of God. While to the Old Testament apocalyptic writer, Daniel, some things remained hidden (comp. Dan 12:9), to the New Testament apocalyptic writer, John, Jesus revealed many things concerning the end-times, which were hidden to man until then. The time of his return continues to remain a secret (comp. Act 1:6; Mat 24:42). This is certainly better, because  
15 if man knew when the Lord will appear to judge the world, man would surely be tempted to live careless right up to that time (comp. Mat 24:43-46; 25:14ff). “...*who testified of the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ, even to everything he saw*”: Compare these words with 1Jo 1:3 – one could say: “typically John” (comp. also Rev 22:8).

20 **V. 3:** This is the first of the seven *Beatitudes* in the book of Revelation. In the course of church-history, theologians and pastors have again and again refused to study and interpret this book, saying that it is too complicated, too dark, too much laden with symbols. It is surprising that great men like the reformer John Calvin, otherwise faithful to the Bible, are among them. Even more, since it is specifically said that there is a blessing in the reading and keeping of the words  
25 proclaimed in this book.

#### 2. Greetings to the seven churches in Asia Minor: Vv 4-8

30 **V. 4a:** “*John to the seven churches which are in Asia*”: This area, as already mentioned above, belongs to the Turkey of today. John is the writer of the letters to the seven churches, but it is the Lord who commissions him. We have already said that the number *seven* symbolises completion or perfection. The fact that this number occurs so many times in the last book of the Bible is no accident, as the book presents the culmination of the revelations of Christ. The number seven occurs in Revelation 49 times (= 7 x 7). Referring to the seven churches which John addresses, the commentator Unger says quite rightly:

35 The recipients are *seven* typical kinds of churches in the Roman province Asia of western Asia Minor. They are examples of the condition of the universal church in all places during the age of the whole history of the Christian church.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Bibel Aktuell: Band 6. Hebräer bis Offenbarung*, ed. and rev. by Samuel Külling, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wetzlar: Verlag Hermann Schulte, 1974), p. 183. We translated from German into English.

5 **Vv 4b-5:** Here we find a reference to the three persons of the Trinity:

1. *"From him who is, and who was, and who is to come"*: The Father (V. 4b).
2. *"The seven Spirits which are before his throne"*: The Spirit of God (V. 4b). Speaking of seven spirits which are before his throne does not mean that there are actually seven (different) Spirits of God. The number *seven* rather symbolises here also the perfection of the Spirit of God. Compare in this context 1Co 2:10-11; Joh 16:8-15. *One Spirit*, see Eph 4:4. Note that in Isa 11:2 the Spirit of Yahweh is characterised with 7 different attributes. Compare also the 7 Spirits in Rev 4:5 with the 7 horns and the 7 eyes of the Lamb in Rev 5:6 which symbolise the omnipotence and omniscience of the Lamb of God.
3. *"And from Jesus Christ"* (V. 5): In verses 5 to 8, Christ is characterised by 7 attributes: 1. The witness (V. 5); 2. The Faithful (V. 5); 3. The first begotten from the dead (V. 5); 4. The prince of the kings of the earth (V. 5); 5. The Alpha and Omega (V. 8; see 22:13: the first and the last, the beginning and the end; see Eph 1:10); 6. The Lord God (V. 8); 7. The Almighty (V. 8).

20

The last part of verses 5 to 7 speaks of the work of Jesus: Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; behold, he comes with the clouds.

25 **V. 6:** *"...and has made us kings (actually a kingdom), and priests unto God and his Father"*: Compare with 1Pe 2:5.9 and Rev 20:4-6; 22:5.

30 **V. 7-8:** The first part of this verse *"he comes with the clouds"* is an allusion to Dan 7:13 where it also says: *"with the clouds of heaven"*. In Mat 24:30 it says that the Son of Man will come *on* the clouds of the sky. Some commentators refer to Heb 12:1, where the glorified believers are described as a "cloud of witnesses" and assume therefore that the coming of the Lord with the clouds of heaven simply means that he comes with his own. While it is true that the Lord will appear with his saints (see also 1Th 4:17; Rev 19:7-14; Zec 14:5), we prefer the actual meaning that he will come on the clouds. Psa 104:3 speaks of the Lord making the clouds his chariots and riding on the wings of the wind. The creator can command and use the whole of creation to his service. *"And every eye will see him"*: Quote from Zec 12:10; see also Isa 59:21 and Rom 11:25-27.

35

### 3. The vision of the Son of Man (Christophany): Vv 9-20

#### a.) The Situation of John: Vv 9-10a

40 **V. 9:** According to Church Father Eusebius, John was exiled on the isle of Patmos in the year 95 under Emperor Domitian to threaten the believers. Victorinus, another Church Father, even said that John despite his old age was forced to labour in a quarry. Patmos is a rocky and rather barren island in the Aegean Sea, some 50 km from the great city of Ephesus.

45 **V. 10a:** *"I was in the Spirit"*: This expression is used four times in Revelation: 1:10 (Christophany); 4:2 (throne of God); 17:3 (prostitute Babylon); 21:10 (New Jerusalem). Compare this "being taken by the Spirit" with Ezekiel in the passages Eze 1:3; 2:2; 8:3 as well as Act 10:10-15 (Peter on the roof of the house sees a sheet with unclean animals coming down from heaven).

**V. 10b:** *"On the Lord's day"* (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ): Distinction must be made between:

- 5 1. ***The day of Christ:*** See 1Co 1:8 and Phi 1:6. Compare with the *judgement seat of Christ* in 2Co 5:10, which in Rom 14:10 is called *judgement seat of God*. This probably refers to the time when the Lord will take his church and everyone's work will be evaluated.
2. ***The day of God:*** So-called in 2Pe 3:12 (in Greek: ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ θεοῦ) when the present creation will be destroyed and replaced with a new creation (2Pe 3:13).
- 10 3. ***The day of the Lord:*** This expression (in Greek: ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου) seems to relate to all events in heaven or on earth taking place between the moment of the rapture of the church and the final judgement (doomsday).

15 The term "*day of the Lord*" (or *Lord's Day*) was already in use at the time of the apostles as referring to the day of resurrection, Sunday, when church-service was celebrated (see in this regard *to break bread* in Act 20:7 and *collection* in 1Co 16:2).

## b.) The Christophany: Vv 10b-16

20 **Vv 10b-11:** John is commanded to write down everything which he sees and to send it to the seven churches. At that moment John did not see the one who commanded him. The command is repeated in verse 19 and there it becomes clear that it is Christ himself, the Lord of the church, who is speaking.

25 **V. 12:** "*I saw seven golden candlesticks*": Possibly behind this symbol we find "hidden": Jesus is the light of the world (Joh 8:12). Therefore he stands in the midst of the lampstands which represent the church (see V. 20). At the same time the believers are called to follow the example of the master, to be the light of the world (Mat 5:14-16).

**Vv 13-16:** The description of Christ:

- 30 • ***"Son of Man"*** (V. 13): Here his human aspect is described, from chapter 4 onward his divinity. Jesus referred to himself repeatedly as *Son of Man* (see Gospels). This term (or picture) is taken significantly from Dan 7:13 and 10:5-6.
- 35 • ***"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow"*** (V. 14a): This probably symbolises his eternity and wisdom. White is a symbol of age and wisdom. Compare Pro 16:31.
- ***"And his eyes were as a flame of fire"*** (V. 14b): Compare Rev 2:18; as well as 19:12 at his return, symbolising that he is also the judge (Joh 5:24-29) whose fiery eyes (which can see all things) overlook nothing (see Heb 4:13).
- 40 • ***"And his feet like unto fine bronze, as if they burned in a furnace"*** (V. 15a): Bronze in Holy Scripture often stands for judgement. When he comes again, he will judge (see Rev 19:15; 2Ti 4:1).
- ***"And his voice as the sound of many waters"*** (V. 15b): Compare with Heb 12:19 and Dan 10:6. In his patience God "delays" the judgement on man's sin, but the day will come, when he will raise his voice and men will not be able to answer or excuse themselves.
- 45 • ***"And he had in his right hand seven stars"*** (V. 16a): In verse 20 the explanation is given by the Lord himself. The stars represent the angels (elders?) of the church and the lampstands the church itself.
- ***"Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword"*** (V. 16b): Compare with this Rev 19:11-15: (cf. Isa 27:1) it could point to the fact that he will judge on the basis of his word. See also Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12.
- 50 • ***"And his countenance was as the sun shines in his strength"*** (V. 16c): This may be a sign of the glory at his return. Compare with Mat 17:2, Mal 3:20 (others 4:2). Added to the meaning that light is a symbol for righteousness (evildoers stay in the darkness – Joh 3:20), it could also point to the fact that because of the light of God the Father and the Lamb in the new creation,

- 5 sun and moon are no more necessary, because the Father and the Son are themselves the source of light. (Rev 21:23; 22:5).

### c.) The Lord's command to John: Vv 17-20

V. 17: When John saw the Lord in his glorious appearance he fell to the ground: similar to Jos 5:14; Exo 33:11.20 and especially Dan 10:8-11.16. We believe that Joshua and Daniel have also  
10 seen Jesus, the so-called pre-existent Christ, i.e. the Son of God before his incarnation. These passages then would be called *Christophanies*. "*I am the first and the last*": Compare with the words of the apostle Paul in Col 1:17-18.

V. 18: "*I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore*": The eternity of  
15 Christ – see also Heb 7:1-3 and 13:8. "*...and have the keys of Death and Hades*": Compare with the words of Jesus in Mat 16:19 and his parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luk 16:19-31). The keys are a symbol of authority. These words show that Christ has power over death and Hades.

V. 19: This verse can be a guide to the interpretation of the whole book (depending on what  
20 position, mentioned earlier, one takes):

1. "*The things you have seen*": I.e. the Son of God (Son of Man), the judge, who lives eternally (Chapter 1:9-20).
2. "*The things which are*": I.e. the present, the seven churches in Asia Minor, which are  
25 probably also representative for the churches of all the times (Ch. 2–3).
3. "*The things which are to take place*": This then would refer to all that is taking place after the churches (or the church). These events are described in the remaining chapters 4–22. Compare the expression "*after these things*" (μετὰ ταῦτα) in 1:19 with "*and I will show you the things which must happen after these things*" (καὶ δείξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα)  
30 in 4:1.

V. 20: Here follows, as stated, the interpretation of verses 11-12 by the Lord himself: "*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches*": Each of the seven letters begins with the words "*unto the angel of the church of . . . write*": Most commentators identify the angel of the church with the  
35 responsible person (elder or pastor) of the church addressed and not with real (heavenly) angels. For the term *angels* in the New Testament see: Mat 11:10; Mar 1:2; Luk 7:24.27; 9:52. The seven lampstands are the seven churches: Indeed the church of Jesus Christ is called to shine as bright lampstands in this dark world.

## 40 B. Present: The Church and the seven Letters: Chapters 2–3

Compare Rev 1:19. With other commentators we believe that the messages to the seven churches also mirror our own spiritual life as well as that of our churches. Each of the seven letters has the same basic structure. The following elements can be distinguished:

- 45 1. Address and name of the church.
2. Self-portrait of the Lord through stating one or several of his attributes, titles or works. It can be noticed that the different self-portraits of the Lord relate to the individual situations of the churches addressed.
- 50 3. Praise: The declaration of the Lord "*I know your deeds!*" (or similar) is missing in the writing to the church of Pergamum. No praise at all is found in the letter to the church of Laodicea.

- 5 4. Critique (missing in the letters to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia).  
 5. Call to repentance and encouragement.  
 6. Challenge: *He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!*  
 7. Promise.

10 There are exceptions, for instance:

- In the letter to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia there is no critique.
- In the letter to the church of Laodicea there is no praise.
- In the letter to the church of Ephesus six items of praise are enumerated (2:2-3). Then follows critique (2:4) and the challenge or warning, that if the church does not repent the Lord will remove its lampstand (2:5). Then there follows, different to the other letters, again praise (a seventh time!) so as if after the hard warning the Lord wants to encourage again through praise.
- The sentence "*He who has an ear, let him hear...*" stands in the first three letters before the concluding promise, in the other four it is placed at the end.

20

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Recipient	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
2	Descrip. of the person of Christ							
3	Praise							
4	Critique							
5	Warning							
6	Challenge							
7	Promise							

For further personal study to a deeper understanding of these letters, it is recommended to fill in the graphic above: Horizontal the seven different churches and vertically the seven different elements occurring in the letters.

25

A short commentary to each of the seven letters:

## 1. Letter to the church of Ephesus: Chapter 2:1-7

Ephesus, the church **lacking love**:

30 **V. 1:** The Lord described with seven stars and seven lampstands: compare 1:16.20.

**Vv 2-3:** Six positive aspects of the church are enumerated. Before we criticise (today) the weak point in the church of Ephesus we have to ask ourselves whether we can also claim the positive

5 points mentioned of the church of Ephesus. Six, even seven strong points speak for this church... but:

10 **V. 4:** Now follows critique: the most important thing is lacking. The Lord blames them, that they have left the first love for him. All activities and the many good works mean nothing if they are not based on love for the Lord (compare 1Co 13:11ff)! Reference to Mat 4:10: *“Worship the Lord your God and serve him only!”* The Lord primarily wants us to worship and love him. Works and ministry should follow as an outflow of our reverence and love.

15 **V. 5:** Because Ephesus has forsaken the first love, the Lord threatens to extinguish the church despite the many positive things they can show (see Vv 2-3.6). We have to examine ourselves again and again on the question of our first love for the Lord.

20 **V. 6:** As to the *Nicolaitans* see 2:15. There were members of the church of Ephesus who were alert and courageous enough to keep the heresy of the Nicolaitans away from the church. In our times tolerance is not only praised in the world but increasingly also in the church. Without a certain tolerance no fellowship, not even among believers, is possible. In the kingdom of God however tolerance also has its limits. Even tolerance has to be orientated to the Word of God. Otherwise the church becomes worldly and has to be accused of conformism as for instance the church of Thyatira.

25 **V. 7a:** *“He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*: Jesus also used these words (see Mat 11:15; Mar 4:23; 7:15 etc.). The Spirit who speaks like this to the churches is the Spirit of the Lord, who lastly inspired John the apostle with these words.

30 **V. 7b:** *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God”*: These promises at the end of the seven letters stand in close connection to the spiritual condition and need of the church, to which the promises were given. Ephesus has lost the first love for the Lord. The fellowship with her Lord was disturbed. The promises to the church of Ephesus relate exactly to this fellowship. The fullness of life is promised in the form of a well-known picture. The tree of life which stood in the midst of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9) was the symbol of intimate fellowship of man with his God, the source of all true life. Through the fall (sin), man was excluded from partaking of this tree (Gen 3:22-24). This blessing will be received and shared in paradise by those who overcome (Rev 22:2).

## 2. Letter to the church of Smyrna: Chapter 2:8-11

40 Smyrna, the **persecuted** church:

45 **V. 8:** Smyrna of old is today called Izmir, one of the larger cities of Turkey. *“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again”*: compare this expression with 1:17-18. In verses 9-10 it speaks of the suffering of the church and the persecution which evidently arose from the Jews in Smyrna. In this situation it was an encouragement for the church to be reminded that her Lord is the one who died and came back to life again. In other words: *“He, the one who has risen from the dead and lives, is also able to raise you to life again, even if you should lose your life”* (see Joh 11:25-26).

50 **V. 9:** The believers in Smyrna were blackmailed and persecuted probably by the Jews. Because they deny Jesus they are in reality not genuine Jews; they are not true descendants of Abraham, but rather a *Synagogue of Satan*. Jesus is the king of the Jews (see Joh 18:33-37; 19:19-22). Someone who denies the king of his own people is ‘outing’ himself. This is the theme of Paul’s treatment of the “question of Israel” in Rom 9–11. These false Jews are called the *Synagogue of Satan* because



5 in their rejection of Jesus and his followers they serve none other than Satan himself. Compare with this passage the hard words of Jesus addressed to the Pharisees in Joh 8:12-59. Note especially verse 44: “*You belong to your father, the devil...*”

10 **V. 10a:** God may allow that his people are tried up to a certain point, but he knows the limit of everyone to intervene at the right time. We are reminded especially of Job and the passage in 1Co 10:13.

15 **V. 10b:** “*10 days*”: for the duration of 10 days compare the passages in Dan 1:12.14 and Gen 24:55. Several commentators (e.g. Beasley-Murray and Unger) interpret this as meaning *a short time*.

20 **Vv 10c-11:** The promise: “*The crown of life*”; actually “*wreath of life*”. It is the reward of martyrs and all those who love the Lord and his coming again (see Jam 1:12 and 2Ti 4:8). “*He that overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*”: The second death is quoted in 20:6.14 and again in 21:8: It is the lake of fire, the place of eternal punishment. Compare this with passages like Dan 12:2 and Isa 66:24 (the inextinguishable fire). It is the place where the beast (Antichrist), the False Prophet, the fallen angels and their prince, the dragon, Satan and all men who follow Satan, by refusing the salvation offered in Christ, will be punished for all eternity (Rev 14:9-11). Indeed, he who knows that he has eternal life should not be afraid of martyrdom, i.e. physical death, as this  
25 does not exclude him from true and eternal life. Compare with this the words of Jesus himself in Mat 10:28 and Luk 10:19; 12:4-5. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two churches that are not criticised. Smyrna is not praised openly but commendation is at least implied in verse 10.

### 3. Letter to the church of Pergamum: Chapter 2:12-17

30 Pergamum, the **tolerant (worldly)** church:

**V. 12b:** “*These things says he who has the sharp sword with two edges*”: Compare 1:16 and 19:15 as well as Isa 11:4. In 2:16 it is clarified that the worldly heretics in her midst are addressed with the warning of Christ (see Vv 14-15).

35 **V. 13a:** “*I know where you live – where Satan has his throne*”: It is known that Pergamum was at that time a centre of pagan idol-worship.<sup>13</sup>

40 **V. 13b:** Praise: Despite persecution the church has kept the faith in Jesus. Antipas was a faithful member of that church, but we learn in church-history no more details concerning him. The mention of his name is an encouragement for believers of all times, that to the Lord our God nothing is hidden and that he never forgets his own.

45 **Vv 14-15:** Blame/critique: **V. 14:** “*You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam*”: This is an allusion to the prophet Balaam who offered his services for money: see Num 22–25 and 31:16. As he was unable to curse the people of Israel Balaam gave to Balak the diabolical advice to tempt the people into moral failure, so that God would judge them (see Num 22:5; 23:8; 31:15-16). There were in Pergamum probably church members who under the cover of Christian liberty took part in banquets in which sacrifices were made to heathen deities. These banquets were generally connected with sexual licentiousness. In Corinth Paul was confronted with the same problem and  
50 he had to admonish the church on that issue (see 1Co 10:20-30 and 5:9-11). It may be assumed that

<sup>13</sup> In Berlin there is a museum called *Pergamum-Museum*. The most famous piece of the whole collection of marble antiques is the so-called ‘Altar of Pergamum’ dedicated to the Greek Senior-god Zeus or the goddess Athena or to both of them. This altar comes from a time somewhere around 180 BC. It was found in Turkey and reassembled in Berlin.

5 there were people in the church of Pergamum who played down the ideal of physical purity. One is reminded of the Corinthian slogan “*anything goes*” (see 1Co 6:12; 10:23). It may have been a so-called ‘liberty’ that was influenced by Gnosticism. **V. 15:** The *Nicolaitans* – not tolerated (rightly so) in the church of Ephesus, for which they are commended by the Lord (see 2:6) – are accepted in this church. The meaning seems to be that there were Nicolaitans in the church of Pergamum who taught in the church the same things as Balaam taught the people of Israel.<sup>14</sup> The Nicolaitans could be the same kind of church-people who are denounced<sup>15</sup> by Peter (2Pe 2:15-16) and Jude (Jude 4.11).

15 **V. 16:** The church is warned that the Lord will judge her if there is no repentance.

**V. 17:** “*To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna...*”: Concerning *Manna*, the heavenly bread which Israel ate in the desert, compare with Exo 16; Joh 6:31-32 and 1Co 10:3. Jesus told the people that he himself is the true bread from heaven that gives eternal life (see Joh 6:35.48.58). The promise has to be understood that those who overcome by faith, will enjoy an eternal and perfect union with Jesus (see also 2Co 5:6-8; 1Jo 3:2). In other words: he who is prepared to stay away from the compromising food (and related indulgences) of pagan people, will receive perfect food in eternity. Compare with this later concerning the tree of life in 22:2. “*A white stone*”: Some commentators think that this could be an allusion to the ephod of the high-priest, which was adorned with 12 stones on which the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were written. In this case the meaning of the *white stone* could be that those who overcome will have the right to enter into the heavenly kingdom or sanctuary (as the high-priest entered the sanctuary of old).

## 4. Letter to the church of Thyatira: Chapter 2:18-29

30 Thyatira, the **compromising** (tolerating worldliness) church:

**Vv 18-19:** “*The Son of God, who has his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass*”: Compare with 1:14-15; 10:1 and Dan 10:6. This description of Christ fits very well with the content of the letter: in the following verse 19, six good works of the church are enumerated (see also the six positive points of the church of Ephesus in 2:2-3), in verse 20 follows the seventh which is negative; it’s the critique. All this is not hidden to the Lord whose eyes are flames of fire (searching to the core). He knows everything.

40 **V. 20:** Critique: “*The woman Jezebel*”: Jezebel was the godless wife of King Ahab who led the people of Israel into idol-worship (service to Baal) and immorality (see 1Ki 16:31-32; 2Ki 9:22.30-33). At this point another remark concerning those who held the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and followed the way of Jezebel: It may well be that these errors had their roots in Gnostic beliefs. There were (and there are today!) Gnostics who taught physical abstention or asceticism (compare with Col 2:18-23; 1Ti 4:1-3), whereas others claimed (we have these today too) that one can abuse the body without consequences (e.g. fornication), as long as the spirit is ‘kept clean’. It seems that Paul alludes in Rom 6 and 1Co 6:12-20 to these false concepts and philosophies.

**Vv 22-23:** Compare the threat of judgement with 1Co 5:5!

<sup>14</sup> Compare Beasley-Murray, 'The Revelation' in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, edited by D. Guthrie et al. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 1284 and Louis Bonnet, *Bible Annotée N. T. 4. Hébreux à Apocalypse*. Revised and augmented. Edited by Alfred Schroeder Reprint (Saint-Légier, Suisse : Publications Evangéliques en Réimpression Limitée Emmaüs, 1983), p. 363.

<sup>15</sup> Compare John H. Alexander, *L'Apocalypse verset par verset*. Connaître la Bible, Cahier N° 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Geneva: La Maison de la Bible, 1982), pp. 91-93.

5

**Vv 24-25:** Here the faithful are encouraged to abide in faith and sanctification until the Lord will return. “*Satan’s so-called deep secrets*”: This may be an ironic allusion to the views of Gnostics who claimed to know the depth of God (compare the expression in 1Co 2:10!); though their concepts were not divine but rather diabolic – not the *depth of God*, but rather the *depth of Satan*.<sup>16</sup>

10 Compare the term “*depth of Satan*” with the *synagogue of Satan* in 2:9 and the *throne of Satan* in 2:13.

**Vv 26-28:** Promises! V. 26: “*To him will I give power over the nations*”: This promise refers to the reward after death, i.e. after the resurrection. In our opinion it is explained with the promise, that  
15 Christ’s own will reign with him for 1000 years (20:4-6; compare Mat 19:28; 1Co 6:3; 2Ti 2:12), and finally into all eternity (Rev 22:5). **V. 27:** Compare with Psa 2:9: Christ in his millennium. **V. 28:** “*...the morning-star*”: The Lord himself carries this title (compare Rev 22:16 with the promise given to the believers in Dan 12:3).

## 5. Letter to the church of Sardis: Chapter 3:1-6

20 Sardis, the **sleeping** or **dead** church:

**V. 1a:** “*He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars*”: As to the *seven Spirits* see 1:4 and 5:6: meaning that the Lord knows everything, and nothing can be hidden from him. As to the *seven stars* compare 1:16.20, which picture the Lord as the head of the church, i.e. as the only one  
25 who has authority over the church.

**Vv 1b-2:** Critique: “*I know your works that you have the name that you live but you are dead*”: This accusation levelled at the church in Sardis catches our attention. In our eyes a church is considered alive when it is conservative (so-called *evangelical*) i.e. when it holds biblical doctrines,  
30 has regular services and holds to other traditional outward marks. In all this there is the constant danger that a living faith becomes paralysed in formalism and dead orthodoxy. This seems to have been the problem of the church of Sardis. Outwardly one joins in the pious show, but deep in the heart there is no engagement, everything becoming routine. What applied to the church of Sardis then, can also be of deep concern for us today. We speak nowadays of so-called nominal  
35 Christians. In the last analysis only the Lord and I myself know the real inner state.

**V. 3:** Warning: The church is called to repentance so that the things entrusted to her (i.e. faith and pure doctrine) will be revived and become reality again. “*I will come like a thief*”: that means suddenly and unexpected at a time when one would not think of it: compare Mat 24:42-44; 1Th  
40 5:2; 2Pe 3:10; Rev 16:15.

**V. 4:** A promise to those who are (really) alive: “*dressed in white*”: The white robe has certainly a deep symbolic meaning; it contrasts with the preceding mention of those *who have not spoiled their clothes*. The white robe symbolises righteousness with which we are clothed through salvation in  
45 Christ. This new garment is a sign of purity and of new life: compare with Isa 61:10; Mat 22:11-12; Rev 6:11; 7:9.13-14. In Rom 13:14 Paul exhorts simply to ‘put on Christ’, whereas the preceding verses show that this refers to a way of life, i.e. the *walk in Christ’s way*.

**V. 5:** Promise: “*... and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life...*”: Representatives of the  
50 doctrine that salvation in Christ once received may be lost again, sometimes quote this verse (besides passages like e. g. Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-29) because it seems to suggest that there are people

<sup>16</sup> Compare G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1285.

5 whose names are written in the book of life, but later erased from that book. Commentators, who do not believe that salvation once received may be lost again, suggest the following solutions:

1. It does not say here that there actually were or are those whose names once stood in the book of life and were afterwards erased again. The statement is to be understood hypothetically and rhetorically: While the church has the name *to be living*, it is in reality dead. This probably means that many of its members belonged only outwardly, in reality they were not born again and therefore not saved. Unger says in his interpretation:

15 This symbolism refers to the custom in some ancient cities to “erase” the names of the citizens who have passed away from a record of that city. So in analogy, the names of those who “have the name that they are living” (since they are members of the visible church), but who are in reality “dead” (i.e. not born again), they are erased from God’s record of ‘citizens of heaven’. They are written in the book of life, because they are *called* unto salvation – but now their names have to be erased because they are not chosen unto salvation...<sup>17</sup>

2. Bonnet<sup>18</sup> points to the fact that it is not said: “*I will write his name in the book of life*”, because this ‘registration’ exists from all eternity (see Rev 13:8); man rather has the possibility, says Bonnet, to refuse his election by his own volition and so ‘forces’ the Lord to erase his name from the book of life.
- 25 3. The writer of this commentary tends to an interpretation that only the elect are written in the book of life, i.e. those who have obeyed the call of God. One is reminded of the words of Jesus in Mat 22:14 according to which “many are called, but few are chosen”.

## 6. Letter to the church of Philadelphia: Chapter 3:7-13

30 Philadelphia, the **living, missionary** church: This church only receives praise/commendation, no critique.

35 **V. 7:** “*He who is holy*”: compare with the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary according to which the Holy Spirit shall come upon her and that which shall be born of her would be holy (Luk 1:35). See also the testimony of Jesus in Joh 10:36. “*He that is true*”: This title is also used in relation to his return in Rev 19:11. Jesus says about himself that he is the truth: Joh 14:6. “*He that has the key of David*”: probably an allusion to Isa 22:22. “*He that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens*”: Christ is the one who holds the key of Death and Hades and also to the kingdom of heaven (Mar 16:19), only through him we are able to come to the Father (Joh 14:6). The next verse speaks of an open door and verse 9 suggests that this *open door* is referring to missionary opportunity.

40 **Vv 8-10:** Praise and promise go together! “*You have little strength*”: The church of Philadelphia may be small, but because it is faithful, the Lord will give a missionary blessing: people will come to faith and the church will grow. Concerning ‘open doors’ for evangelisation: compare 1Co 16:9; 2Co 2:12 and Col 4:3. These words addressed to the church of Philadelphia are a great encouragement to faithful Christians – wherever and whenever – when they are in a minority situation. In a modern way, this could be expressed as: Christ does not seek quantity but quality.

<sup>17</sup> Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 194. We translated from German into English.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Bonnet, op. cit., p. 368. Bonnet enumerates other passages of the Holy Scripture concerning the „book of life“: Exo 32:33; Psa 69:29; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1.

5 **V. 10:** “...keep you from the hour of trial”: Bonnet, Beasley-Murray and others say, that this does not refer to the great tribulation at the time of the Antichrist, but to general trials to which all Christians (no matter what epoch) are subject to (see Mat 26:40-41; Joh 17:15; 2Ti 3:12). Unger, Pache and others interpret this verse that believers will be saved from the great tribulation, i.e. that the true church will be raptured before the great tribulation. It seems more plausible to us that here  
10 it refers not to general trials (1Co 10:13) but rather to the great tribulation of the end-times as it speaks of “*the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world...*” Chapters 6–19 then speak explicitly of the great tribulation which invites us to view 3:10 and 7:14 together.

15 **V. 11:** “...that no one will take your crown”: In reference to the crown compare: Rev 2:10; 1Co 9:25; 2Ti 4:8 and Jam 1:12. The encouragement to hold on what you have (faithful discipleship) is for the purpose that they will not lose the reward (not salvation as such) – compare with 1Co 3:11-15.

20 **V. 12:** “...a pillar in the temple”: For *pillar* compare Gal 2:9, where Paul says that James (brother of the Lord) and John (the disciple) were regarded as *pillars* of the church in Jerusalem which means that they were its responsible leaders. In 1Pe 2:4 the church is called a temple of the Spirit. Compare in this connection with Eph 2:19-22 as well as 1Co 3:16 and 6:19. *Temple* and *pillar* here are to be taken figuratively, so this verse is not a contradiction to Rev 21:22 which describes that in the New Jerusalem there will be no temple because God and his Son will be their temple. So this  
25 promise is pointing to the eternal union with God and the Lamb which is the portion of those who overcome. “*The New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven*”: see Rev 21:2.9ff.

## 7. Letter to the church of Laodicea: Chapter 3:14-22

The **lukewarm** and **complacent** Church: The church of Laodicea is referred to in Col 4:13-16.

30 **V. 14:** Jesus is called “*the Amen*” (see 2Co 1:20), *the faithful and true witness*. This contrasts fittingly with the church of Laodicea which is accused of being lukewarm, proud and complacent. “*The beginning of the creation of God*”: This means that Christ is himself the creator as stated also in the prologue of the gospel of John (Joh 1:3); compare with Col 1:15-18 and Heb 1:1-3. This pointer to Christ as the creator could be understood as an indirect allusion to the stupidity of pride  
35 in the church of Laodicea.

**Vv 15-19:** Only blame, no commendation is addressed to this church! The accusations go well together with the general situation in the town of Laodicea. **V. 17:** “*You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing...*”: Laodicea was in fact a rich city. When it was largely  
40 destroyed by an earthquake in the year 60 AD the citizens refused financial help from Rome preferring to rebuild the city with their own means. “*But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*”: Laodicea was further known for the production of fine black wool, out of which cloth was manufactured. This contrasts with the description of the church being *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*. Laodicea was at that time also a medical centre that  
45 produced eye salve and the town was renowned for its hot springs of mineral-water (*hot* and not *lukewarm*, as the condition of the church!). What irony, that the Lord advises specifically this church to buy from him pure gold (true riches which is not earthly, transient wealth), with clothes (in contrast to black wool) and eye salve (to see spiritually)! The church should buy exactly the things it thinks it possesses from the Lord. All these admonitions make clear that the church lived  
50 in an illusory self-sufficiency and proud complacency. Exaltation and pride are a particular abomination to the Lord. God opposes the proud (Jam 4:6 and 1Pe 5:5-6). **V. 19:** As mentioned only this church is not commended by the Lord at all – not with even one word. But still he says to her: “*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline!*” He commands the church to repent. To be able to repent, one has to be prepared to humble oneself. Humility was the one thing which the believers

- 5 of this church needed desperately. The Lord wants the restoration of his children and his church. *Those whom the Lord loves he rebukes and disciplines:* compare with Heb 12:5-11; Pro 3:12 and Job 5:17.
- 10 **V. 20-21:** “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock...*”: This verse is often quoted in connection with evangelism, but it should be noticed that this call is addressed to a church. Admitted, in churches there are always those who are just Christians by name and the Lord knows about them (by the way, so does the apostle John: see 1Jo 2:19!). The Lord calls not only the unbelievers to repentance and conversion from their wrong ways; he admonishes also his children again and again to repent, to bring their life into the light of God. Compare what John says in this connection in 1Jo 1:7-9.
- 15 Concerning the separation from fellowship with God, see the words in Isa 59:2. It is stated that the Lord stands at the door and knocks... of course he could break the door open and enter with force. This is just an example that shows that the Lord does not compel anyone to fellowship with him. Salvation, fellowship and blessing from him are not forced upon us. God only has voluntary children! He wants all to come to repentance and be saved (1Ti 2:3-4; 2Pe 3:9) but forces no one.
- 20 Love invites and woos, but does not pressurise, otherwise it would not be love! **V. 21:** Promise: “*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne...*”: This means to ‘co-reign’ with Christ: compare Mat 19:28; Rev 2:26-27; 20:4-6; 22:5. From this place onward the term *church* (ἐκκλησία) is not mentioned anymore until the epilogue (22:16). Christians from chapter 4 onward are described as *those who follow the Lamb, keep the testimony of Jesus, have not*
- 25 *received the mark of the beast, those who come out of the great tribulation*, etc. From chapter 4 onward the vision of the reader is directed to the future (see 1:19c), i.e. now to John is revealed *what must take place after this* (see also in 4:1).

## C. Future: what must take place after this: Ch. 4–22

### 1. The throne of God in heaven: Chapters 4–5

- 30 The following layout can help towards a better understanding of the matters in these two chapters:

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Prologue Christ is in the centre Chapter 1	To the 7 churches  Chapters 2–3	The throne in heaven  Chapter 4	The book of the lamb  Chapter 5
	7 letters	5 Doxologies	
1. Ephesus 2. Smyrna 3. Pergamum 4. Thyatira 5. Sardis 6. Philadelphia 7. Laodicea	<p>only praise</p> <p>danger of removal</p>	1. "Holy, holy, holy" (4:8) (God) 2. "You are worthy" (4:11) (God) 3. "You are worthy" (5:9-10) (the Lamb) 4. "The Lamb who was slain" (5:12) (the Lamb) 5. "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power" (5:13) (God and the Lamb)	
Christophany:  Christ in the midst of the church		Theophany:  <i>God on the throne</i>	Christophany:  The Lamb in the midst of the throne
On earth		In heaven	

5

Chapters 4–5 give us an insight into the heavenly world, into the presence of God and of his Son Jesus Christ (the Lamb compare with 5:6). These two chapters can be seen as a prelude to the chapters 6–22. The events of the future have been decreed and decided by God and are now being executed by the Lamb (chapters 4–5). A description of the end-times begins in chapter 6 with the opening of the first seal by the Lamb, i.e. through Jesus Christ (6:1).

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### a.) The throne of God and his entourage: Chapter 4

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**V. 1:** "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." In the preceding two chapters (chapters 2–3) the church of Jesus Christ was addressed (letters to the seven churches). The words of 4:1 addressed to John are understood by many commentators as an indication that the church of Jesus Christ will not have to go through the time of judgement (the time of the Antichrist and the so-called *great tribulation*) described in chapters 6–19. The church will be taken by Christ in the rapture before the judgements described from 6:2 onward. The Greek text in 4:1 in fact may speak for this interpretation, it does not only say: "Come up here, and I will show you what will happen in the future" or something like that. No, it says literally: "Come up here and I will show you the things which must take place after these things." As *these things* refer to the seven churches of chapter 2–3, one could conclude that the judgements described in chapter 6 (chapters 4–5 are leading up to the judgements of 6:2) are only beginning after the time of the church. Speaking for this interpretation are the following arguments:

25

- 1:19 is also divided into: 1. "What you have seen" 2. "What is now" and 3. "What will take place later." What John has seen probably refers to the so-called Christophany in 1:11-18, what is now, referring to the church (1:20; 2–3) and what will take place later describes the events taking place after Rev 3.

• In 4:4.10 it speaks of the 24 elders sitting on thrones (compare 20:4). The term “*elders*” refers probably to glorified believers (see below). If believers are already sitting on the throne one can assume that the church (at this time) has already appeared before the judgement seat of Christ and is gathered with Him (compare 2Co 5:10).

• In 19:1-10 it speaks of the bride of Jesus, i.e. the church. The context suggests that the church is already with Christ at the time when the Lord appears to judge the nations, the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet (19:11-21). Concerning the return of the Lord with his saints, see also 1Th 3:13; Zec 14:5.

**Vv 2-3:** The throne of God, see Eze 1:26-28 (and again the parallel in Eze 10). The *rainbow* (compare Eze 1:28) could represent a symbol of the grace of God based on the sacrifice of his Son. The rainbow is also mentioned in connection with the mighty angel in Rev 10:1 (more see *ad loc*). One has to think of the rainbow in connection with the flood at the time of Noah (Gen 8:20-22). The ark could be a type of Christ: as those inside the ark were saved, so also those who are “in Christ” (Joh 1:12; 3:16.36; 1Jo 5:12).

**Vv 4.10-11: The 24 elders:** In Greek the word πρεσβύτερος (*presbúteros* = *the elder*). They wear golden crowns, i.e. golden wreaths (see 4:4: ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς: *on their heads golden wreaths*). To the wreath of the victor as a reward for believers compare the following passages: 1Co 9:24-27; 2Ti 4:7-8; Jam 1:12; 1Pe 5:4. Many commentators believe that the 24 elders stand as representatives for the full number of the redeemed from the old and new covenant: As to the number 24, compare 21:10-14: 12 apostles and 12 representatives of the 12 tribes. Compare also with 1Ch 24:1-19 and Mat 19:28.

**V. 6a:** “...like a sea of glass, clear as crystal...”: One should compare this with passages in Rev 15:2; Exo 24:10-11; Eze 1:22. Maybe this should be connected with the river of the water of life in Rev 22:1ff. This passage again reminds us of Eze 47:1 – the water coming out from the temple brings life wherever it flows. As to the symbolism of living water see the passages in Joh 4:14-15; 7:37-39; Rev 22:17.

**Vv 6b-9:** The four *living creatures* are so-called *Cherubim*. See the references in Gen 3:24; Eze 1:5-24; 10:1-22; compare also with the two golden Cherubim on the cover of the ark (mercy-seat) in the most holy place in the tabernacle (Exo 25:17-20).

**V. 8:** The first praise comes from the four living creatures: They pray to the triune<sup>19</sup> holy and eternal God. In the Greek language God is praised as the *Pantokrátōr*, i.e. the *almighty one, who is, and who was, and who is to come* (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος; see 1:4.8). To the Almighty belongs the past, the present and the future. He has been from all eternity, he does not change, and he is forever (see 1Ti 1:17; Jam 1:17).

**Vv 10-11:** The second praise comes from the 24 elders: They worship the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Compare with passages in Joh 1:3ff; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-3, where it is said that Jesus is the creator and that he sustains all things.

## **b.) The Lamb and the sealed book: Chapter 5**

### **(1) The book with the seven seals which only the Lamb can open: Vv 1-7**

<sup>19</sup> Compare the *holy, holy, holy* with Isa 6:3, where the Seraphim praise Yahweh.



5 **V. 1:** The one sitting on the throne is doubtless God the Father and not Christ, as he approaches the one sitting on the throne to receive the sealed book from his right hand (see V. 8). The question arises: what kind of book is this? The connection from chapter 6:1 suggests that in it are described the coming judgements and saving acts of God which merge in the consummation of the kingdom of God. The whole could be summed up: *Through judgement to consummation*.

10 **Vv 2-4:** No creature in the whole universe is able to open the sealed book. Why as well not angels? Probably because the judgement on earth was provoked by the sin of man. Therefore the book has to be opened by a man. But because all men since the fall of Adam (see Gen 3:1ff; Rom 3:10.23; 5:12ff; Eph 2:1-3; Psa 51:7) are sinners, no one is worthy to open the book... except:

15 **Vv 5-7:** The Lamb of God! Christ is descended (according to the flesh) from David (Rev 5:5; 22:16; Rom 1:3); therefore he is also called "Son of Man" see Rev 1:13; Dan 7:13; Mat 24:27. He, the incarnate Son of God, is the only man who never sinned (see Isa 53:9; Joh 8:46; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26). Because of this he could die in our place when he paid the price for our sin, namely death, on the cross (V. 9; see Col 1:20; 2:14-15). Jesus is also the one who will judge all men, because he is the Son of Man (Joh 5:27).

## (2) Praise to the glory of the Lamb: Vv 8-14

- Praise by the **four living creatures and the 24 elders:** Vv 8-10 point to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
- 25 • Praise by the **angels** (Vv 11-12): *Thousands upon thousands*, i.e. actually *ten thousand times ten thousand*. Compare the parallel in Dan 7:10. The angels also worship the Lamb. When Jesus humbled himself and became man he was lower than angels for a short time (Heb 2:7ff), but after his resurrection and ascension he was more so placed over every creature as well as angels (Heb 1:5ff). His perfection is expressed in verse 12 through seven attributes: 1. Power 2. Wealth 3. Wisdom 4. Strength 5. Honour 6. Glory 7. Praise.
- 30 • Praise by **all creatures:** Here the Father and the Son (the Lamb) are worshiped by all creatures: see Psa 96:11-12; 148:2-13 and Rom 8:19-22.

## 2. The great tribulation on earth: Chapters 6–19

35 The following headings should help to understand the structure of this section:

Power of Conquest rider with bow	<b>6:1-3</b> <i>1<sup>st</sup> seal</i>	white horse
40 peace taken; war: <i>to him was given a large sword</i>	<b>6:4</b> <i>2<sup>nd</sup> seal</i>	fiery red horse
lack of food famine	<b>6:5-6</b> <i>3<sup>rd</sup> seal</i>	black horse
45 sword, famine and plague ¼ of mankind dies	<b>6:8</b> <i>4<sup>th</sup> seal</i>	pale horse
souls of martyrs under the altar	<b>6:9-11</b> <i>5<sup>th</sup> seal</i>	souls under the altar, who demand judgement

5	earthquakes and cosmic phenomena	<b>6:12-17</b> <b>6<sup>th</sup> seal</b>	earthquakes men are shaken
	the 144'000 of the 12 tribes receive the seal of God	<b>7:1-8</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup> parenthesis</b>	144'000 from the 12 tribes of Israel
10	the great multitude out of all nations before the throne	<b>7:9-17</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup> parenthesis</b>	multitude that cannot be counted
15	½ hour silence in heaven the 7 angels with 7 trumpets	<b>8:1-6</b> <b>7<sup>th</sup> seal</b>	silence: altar of incense and angels with trumpets
	⅓ of the earth burned up vegetation affected	<b>8:7</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup> trumpet</b>	hail and fire mixed with blood ⅓ of the earth (nature) burned up
20	⅓ of the sea turned into blood ⅓ of creatures and ships affected	<b>8:8-9</b> <b>2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet</b>	a mountain ablaze thrown into the sea: ⅓ affected
	⅓ of rivers turned bitter many people die from it	<b>8:10-11</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet</b>	a great star called <i>Wormwood</i> poisons ⅓ of the rivers
25	light diminished ⅓	<b>8:12</b> <b>4<sup>th</sup> trumpet</b>	⅓ of sun, moon and stars turned dark
30	locusts from the abyss to torture man for 5 months	<b>9:1-12</b> <b>5<sup>th</sup> trumpet</b>	an angel from heaven opens the abyss
	200 million horsemen ⅓ of mankind perishes	<b>9:13-21</b> <b>6<sup>th</sup> trumpet</b>	4 angels at the Euphrates are let loose
35	the angel with the little scroll the 7 thunders	<b>10:1-11</b> <b>2<sup>nd</sup> parenthesis</b>	the angel with the little scroll standing on sea and land
40	the 2 witnesses who prophecy for 1260 days	<b>11:1-14</b> <b>2<sup>nd</sup> parenthesis</b>	the two witnesses and the beast
	heaven: kingdom given to Christ earth: earthquakes and hail	<b>11:15-19</b> <b>7<sup>th</sup> trumpet</b>	Christ reigns
45	the woman, the child, the red dragon and the angel Michael	<b>12:1-17</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> parenthesis</b>	the woman, the child, the red dragon and the angel Michael
	the beast and the False Prophet the time of the Antichrist	<b>12:18–13:18</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> parenthesis</b>	the Antichrist (13:1ff) the False Prophet (13:11ff)
50	the Lamb and the 144'000; the 3 angels; harvest of grain and grapes	<b>14:1-20</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> parenthesis</b>	the lamb and the 144'000; 3 angels; harvest of grain
55	The completion of judgement: 7 angels with 7 golden bowls	<b>15:1–16:21</b> <b>7 bowls</b>	15:1-8: 7 angels in the temple 16:1-20: 7 bowls poured out

**The following structure is noticed:**

5	4 seals	(four horses)	2 seals	<i>1<sup>st</sup> parenthesis</i>	1 seal
	4 trumpets	(4 catastrophes in nature)	2 trumpets	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> parenthesis</i>	1 trumpet
	followed by:			<i>3<sup>rd</sup> parenthesis</i>	7 bowls

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Chapters 17–18 (fall of Babylon) and chapter 19 (return of Christ) need chronologically to be placed in 16:12-21 (Armageddon and the fall of Babylon).

15 The following questions are contended among commentators: Are the 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls different judgements, which follow chronologically, or do they represent the same judgements under various aspects? This would mean:

**1<sup>st</sup> variant:** 7 seals 7 trumpets 7 bowls

20 **2<sup>nd</sup> variant:** 1<sup>st</sup> seal      2<sup>nd</sup> seal      3<sup>rd</sup> seal etc.  
                          1<sup>st</sup> trumpet      2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet      3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet etc.  
                          1<sup>st</sup> bowl      2<sup>nd</sup> bowl      3<sup>rd</sup> bowl etc. (each parallel)

25 **Arguments that speak for a chronological sequence of the judgements of seals, trumpets and bowls:**

1. In 8:1 it says that the 7<sup>th</sup> seal leads to or includes the 7 trumpets. Then one would mean that the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet cannot be at the same time as the 1<sup>st</sup> seal. In other words the trumpet-judgements follow the seal-judgements; they cannot be parallel in time.
2. 6:12-17: The 6<sup>th</sup> seal includes a great earthquake. 9:13ff: the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet on the other hand includes war. The 6<sup>th</sup> seal and the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet do not seem to be identical.
3. 15:1 seems to show that the bowls are not parallel to the trumpets, but rather follow chronologically as 8:1 suggests that the trumpets follow the seals.

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**There are on the other hand indications that speak for a parallel understanding:**

1. The 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet (9:13ff) and the 6<sup>th</sup> bowl (16:12ff) are similar.
2. The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet (11:15ff) and the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl (16:17-21) are similar.
3. The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet: the kingdom is given to the Lord. This suggests consummation and one does not expect further judgements.

**This does not change the fact that there are differences:**

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet (8:7) differs from the 1<sup>st</sup> bowl (16:2).
2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet (8:8-9) is like the 2<sup>nd</sup> bowl (16:3), but in 8:8 it says that only one third of the earth is affected. This is not repeated in 16:3.
3. The same applies to the 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet (8:10-11) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> bowl (16:4-7).
4. The 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet (8:12-13) speaks of the darkening of the stars, whereas the 4<sup>th</sup> bowl (16:8-9) describes that the inhabitants of the earth are scorched by the sun.
5. The 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet (9:1ff) refers to demonic powers that have authority to torture unbelieving men, whereas the 5<sup>th</sup> bowl refers to torment of the kingdom of the beast.

55 **Résumé:** Between some trumpet-judgements and bowl-judgements there are similarities, but not between all of them (particularly not between the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet and the 1<sup>st</sup> bowl). We tend to the following conclusion:

- 5 1. The seal-judgements and the trumpet-judgements do not run parallel but chronologically.  
 2. The seal-judgements, trumpet-judgements and bowl-judgements point to a continuous growing intensity of the judgements, meaning that the trumpet-judgements are harder than the seal-judgements and the bowl-judgements are graver than the trumpet-judgements.
- 10 Concerning this question we finally would like to emphasize that Rev 11:14 may possibly be a key for establishing the chronological order of the events described in Rev 6–19: the first “woe” refers to the judgement of the fifth trumpet (see Rev 9:12); the second “woe” coincides (according to Rev 11:14) obviously with the end of the ministry of the two witnesses which will last 3 ½ years. So the ministry of the two witnesses concerns obviously the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel (cf. Dan 9:24-27<sup>20</sup>). Accordingly the seventh trumpet (cf. Rev 11:15-19) would then introduce the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that the third “woe” is mentioned in Rev 12:12, namely in relation with Satan’s (final) casting out of heaven down to the earth. The expression “woe” (in Greek: οὐαὶ [*ouai*]) is not mentioned anymore after Rev 12:12, except in Rev 18:10.16.19 in relation with the harlot Babylon, but there always twice (“woe, woe”). From the beginning of the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel onwards Satan will no longer be able to accuse the believers before God (cf. Rev 12:14.17; 13:5-7). This passage says that the devil is in great fury knowing that he has only *a short time* (to act). In Rev. 12:14 this duration is precisely stated: *a time and times and half a time*, i.e. another 3 ½ years. Therefore we believe that the events described in chapters 12–19 relate to the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel that means to the time which follows the breaking of the covenant by the Antichrist which he will make with Israel in the end time, when the ultimate persecution of Israel and the Christians (who will live in that time) will commence (cf. Rev 12:14.17; 13:5-7).

### a.) The first six seals: Chapter 6

Observe the following analogies between Rev 6 and Mat 24:

30	Mat 24:5:	Deception	1 <sup>st</sup> seal: Rev 6:1-2
	Mat 24:6-7:	War	2 <sup>nd</sup> seal: Rev 6:3-4
	Mat 24:7:	Famine	3 <sup>rd</sup> seal: Rev 6:5-6
	Mat 24:7-8:	War, catastrophes	4 <sup>th</sup> seal: Rev 6:7-8
35	Mat 24:9-10.16-22:	Martyrdom of believers	5 <sup>th</sup> seal: Rev 6:9-11
	Mat 24:29-35:	Cosmic catastrophes	6 <sup>th</sup> seal: Rev 6:12-17

#### (1) Opening of the first seal: Chapter 6:1-2

To the symbolism of the different coloured horses the Old Testament passages Zec 1:8ff and 6:1-8 should be compared. Who is the rider on the **white horse**? Various interpretations are suggested:

- 40 1. It is a reference to victorious Rome where it was custom that a victorious general would ride triumphantly on a white horse into the city.  
 2. It speaks of the spread of the gospel (see Mat 24:14; Mar 13:10).<sup>21</sup>  
 3. In analogy to Rev 19:11ff, the white horseman represents Christ.  
 45 4. It speaks of the Antichrist. As the opponent of Christ he is clothed also in white to deceive and to lead mankind astray (compare Mat 7:15; Joh 8:44; 2Co 11:13-14; 2Th 2:4.9-12; Rev 2:13; 13:1ff etc.).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> More on that see our brochure on the prophet Daniel *ad loc.*

<sup>21</sup> So for instance Louis Bonnet, *op cit.*, 379.

<sup>22</sup> So for instance Mathias Rissi, *Alpha und Omega: Eine Deutung der Johannesoffenbarung* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1966), 74-75; Merrill F. Unger, *op. cit.*, 203; John F. Walvoord, *op. cit.*, 947.

5 We support the fourth variant, i.e. that the white horseman speaks of the coming Antichrist, who imitates Christ to deceive man (see Mat 24). That this figure is not Christ himself is self-evident, because the horseman appears at the order of the Lamb. It is inconceivable that Christ calls himself. The context also suggests that all four riders (also the white rider) are bringing destruction (compare with the first four trumpet-judgements).

## 10 (2) Opening of the second seal: Chapter 6:3-4

The **fiery-red horse** symbolises war: compare with Zec 6:1-8. Red is the colour of blood (to judgement and blood see also Rev 14:18-20). Satan is a murderer from the beginning (Joh 8:44), therefore he is depicted in Revelation as a red dragon (Rev 12:3-4,7-9). Satan gives to the beast, the Antichrist, his power (see 2Th 2:9; Rev 13:2-4).

## 15 (3) Opening of the third seal: Chapter 6:5-6

The **black horse** stands for famine, a lack of basic staple food (see La 5:10). In recent times high ranking politicians and UN organisations are concerned with the threatening scenario of worldwide famines and lack of drinking water. This prophecy is very much up to date. “*A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages*”: At that time one denarius was the wage of a day's labour and it could buy 8 quarts of wheat or 24 quarts of barley (see also Mat 20:2): “*...do not damage the oil and the wine!*”: The fact that oil and wine – speaking in Holy Scripture of riches and blessing – should not be affected underlines the tragedy of the situation. The basic staple foods are in short supply and inflation keeps people from buying articles of luxury, because everyone saves his money for wheat and barley.<sup>23</sup>

## 25 (4) Opening of the fourth seal: Chapter 6:7-8

The **pale horse**: One quarter of mankind will perish in the four following judgements: Sword, hunger, death (plague) and wild animals (see Eze 14:21). Here it speaks of a quarter of the world population, in 9:18 of one third. This already amounts to more than half of mankind.

## (5) Opening of the fifth seal: Chapter 6:9-11

30 With *altar* one has to think of an altar of sacrifice in the heavenly tent, i.e. it has symbolic meaning (for the heavenly tent, or temple and altar compare 8:2ff; 11:19; 15:5-8). In biblical language a martyr is a kind of sacrifice to the Lord (see Mat 16:25; Rom 12:1; 2Ti 4:6-8), therefore John sees the martyrs under the altar.

35 But who are the *souls*? Some commentators believe that these are the martyrs of the great tribulation, others think of martyrs of all times. Both assumptions are possible. The passage in Rev 7:9.14-15 (they who have come out of the great tribulation) suggests that it speaks of the martyrs of the great tribulation only.

40 **V. 10:** They pray that the Lord would avenge their blood (compare with the so-called psalms of vengeance like Psa 94:3; 137:7-9). During our lifetime as believers in Christ we are exhorted to pray for the conversion of our enemies (see Mat 5:38-48; Rom 12:17-21 and the example of Jesus in Luk 23:34) and not to repay evil with evil. After death and at his return vengeance takes place: see for instance Heb 9:27; Isa 26:21; 2Th 1:6-10.

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<sup>23</sup> Compare with John H. Alexander, op. cit., 167.

- 5 **V. 11:** “...a white robe”: The white colour symbolises the purity of those who have been justified through Jesus Christ: see Rev 3:5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:13-14; 12:11; 19:14 and Zec 3:3-5.

## (6) Opening of the sixth seal: Chapter 6:12-17

- 10 While some interpret the described catastrophes in a literal way, others think that these pictures are to be understood symbolically, i.e. in the sense of political chaos under the Antichrist. Interpreting the statements literally one thinks of cosmic catastrophes and gets the impression that the world is already coming to an end. The following chapters rather speak of a continuation of judgements.

**V. 12a:** Earthquakes: see Isa 13:13 and Mat 24:7.

- 15 **V. 12b:** Eclipse of the sun: see Exo 10:22; Isa 13:10; Mat 24:29-30; 27:45.51.

**V. 12c:** The moon turned blood red: see Joe 2:30; Mat 24:29.

- 20 **V. 13:** Stars falling from the sky: see Rev 8:12. Does one have to think of meteorites?

**V. 14a:** The sky rolled together like a scroll (compare the picture in Isa 34:4): either a pre-taste of the end of the world or simply a proleptic preview (as the anticipating praise in 11:15-17 in the moment of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet) of the same. The end of the world (see Rev 20:11) is supposed to take place only after the millennium (Rev 20:1-10). Compare also with 2Pe 3:10-12; Isa 24:19-20.

- 25 **V. 14b:** Mountains and islands moved from their place (see Psa 97:5; Isa 24:19).

- 30 **Vv 15-17:** Men hiding in caves and among rocks: compare this picture with Isa 2:10 and Hos 10:8. The expression “*the wrath of the Lamb*”: This is in fact a paradox, because a lamb stands for gentleness and humility. In allusion to Rev 5:5-6 one could interpret this as follows: whoever does not accept Jesus as the Lamb of God will face him on the judgement day as a ferocious lion (from the tribe of Judah)!

## b.) The first parenthesis: Chapter 7

### (1) The 144'000 with the seal of God: Vv 1-8

- 35 Compare these 144'000 with those of Rev 14:1-5.

(a) *The plagues held back: Vv 1-3*

**V. 1:** “4 winds”: The number four points to its worldwide aspect and the winds as such are to be seen as signs of the coming judgement.

- 40 **Vv 2-3:** Some will be kept safe through the great tribulation. Concerning the seal, compare with Eze 9:3-4. It may well refer to a visible seal and not “only” the seal of the Spirit (of God) of which the New Testament speaks in passages like Eph 1:13 and 4:30.

(b) *Who are the 144'000?*

- 5 On this question commentators are far from unanimous: Many exegetes think that the mentioned 144'000 from the 12 tribes of Israel symbolise the church of Christ at the end of time.<sup>24</sup>

Against this spiritualising interpretation the following arguments are raised:

- 10 • If the group of the 144'000, of whom verses 1-8 speak, should (already) symbolise the church of Jesus, who is then the group spoken of in verses 9ff (the great multitude out of every nation and people) to be identified with? In this chapter they are mentioned obviously as two different entities.
- 15 • Paul distinguishes between the church (of Jesus) and Israel (as a nation): see Rom. 11:25-27; 1Co 10:32 and possibly Gal 6:16. Nowhere in Holy Scripture does it say that the 12 tribes and the church of Jesus are identical, or that the one has replaced the other.

20 If these 144'000 do not represent the church during the great tribulation, but another entity, assuming that the church is actually raptured before the great tribulation then inevitably the following question arises:

Will there still be people to be saved after the rapture? Followers of a pretribulational view<sup>25</sup> will answer affirmatively and will support this with the following statements:

- 25 • The heroes of faith in the Old Testament, who believed anticipating Christ, are saved in the same way as us today (under the new covenant).
- 30 • During the life of Jesus on this earth the Spirit had not been given (to the believers) Joh 7:37-39, yet there were some saved already then, for instance the repentant criminal on the cross. After the rapture of the believers the Holy Spirit can work among men like he did before Pentecost. The following passages suggest that the time of the great tribulation is essentially to be distinguished from the age of the church:
- 35 1. Rev 11:3ff: Two witnesses will prophesy at that time and their acts (fire from heaven, withholding of rain, changing of water into blood) remind us of the works of the prophets in the Old Testament (compare: Moses in Exo 7:20-21 and Elijah in 1Ki 17:1ff and 2Ki 1:9-13).
- 40 2. Rev 14:6-7: An angel of God proclaims an eternal gospel in mid-heaven. The proclamation of the gospel in our age is the task and responsibility of believers and is not accomplished by angels.

45 Could it not be imagined that men will still be converted at that time through the works and testimony of the two witnesses? Already the fact that each of these sects has far more than 144'000 members, should make their followers wonder. The following three interpretations are offered by evangelical commentators:

- 50 • The 12 tribes of 12'000 men each symbolise the full number of the church of Jesus. The symbolic interpretation presents itself especially because the number 144 comes to 12 x 12 (the square number of 12).
- The number 144'000 is to be understood symbolically, but it refers to the people of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> So Gerhard Gläser, 'Offenbarung' in *Kommentar zur Bibel*, ed. Donald Guthrie, J. Alec Motyer (translated from English *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie et al., Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 1<sup>st</sup> paperback-edition (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus-Verlag, 1987), 3: p. 599.

<sup>25</sup> = Doctrine of the rapture **before** the great tribulation.

- 5 • The 144'000 are chosen ones from the nation of Israel who are kept by God during the time of the Antichrist to move into the millennium.

We prefer the third variant. It is true that today's Christians are the spiritual Israel (see Rom 11:17ff), but the mentioned 12 tribes hardly allow in our opinion an allegorical identification with the church of Jesus. Concerning 144'000 Israelites: see Num 31:1ff where Moses sends 12'000 Israelites (1000 men from each tribe) into the battle against the Midianites. If the majority of the Jews today are not able to define with certainty to which tribe they belong, it remains, that God knows.

15 In this list of 12 tribes there are two major ones missing: Ephraim and Dan. This absence has caused more ink to flow than the presence of the other tribes. The absence of Ephraim can be explained with the mention of his father Joseph. But the omission of Dan is more difficult to explain. Different suggestions have been made to explain the absence of these two names. Here, one of them, that has some weight:

20 The omission of these two names is a consequence of the sin of Jeroboam: This king ordered after the division of the kingdom that two golden calves should be erected in his dominion, to be worshiped by the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom, so that they would not return to the temple of Solomon at Jerusalem in the southern kingdom.<sup>26</sup> One calf was erected at Dan in the very North, the other in Bethel, which lies in the area of the tribe of Ephraim. These calves became for the whole of Israel a cause of sin. The meaning then would be that God punished this sin of idolatry in that he erased the two tribes from the list. Unger says in his commentary:

30 These are Israelites who live at the time of "trouble for Jacob" (Jer 30, 5 - 7). Even if the genealogies of the tribes of Israel do not exist anymore, God knows where they are and to which tribe they belong (Isa 11, 11 - 16), and he will keep a chosen remnant leading them to the restored kingdom (Act 1, 6). This will take place when "the times of the gentiles" are fulfilled (Luk 21, 24), and "the full number of the gentiles has come in" (Act 15, 14; Rom 11, 25). In the list of the tribes Dan and Ephraim are omitted, probably because of their involvement in heathen idolatry (Deu 29, 18 - 21; 1Ki 12, 25 - 30; compare Eze 48, 1 - 7.23 - 29).<sup>27</sup>

35

## (2) The great multitude in heaven: Vv 9-17

The 144'000 we have looked at were seen on the earth, but this group seen by John is found in heaven. Who is this multitude of men? Many commentators hold that the 144'000 of verses 1-8 are identical with the group in verses 9-17. We rather prefer the direction given by commentators like Unger and Alexander who claim that there are two different entities to be distinguished. The phrase "*after this*" could speak for this view. The following suggestions amongst others are made:

- 45 • This multitude consists of martyrs who have given their lives in the course of history.
- They are the risen and already glorified believers, i.e. a special group of the redeemed who have received their reward before the others.
- It refers to Jews who were converted in the course of the ages.
- Or certain souls who are waiting for their resurrection body.

<sup>26</sup> Jeroboam feared that if his people worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem they would start to think of a reunion of the kingdom and that he would lose his power which he had recently asserted (see 1Ki 12).

<sup>27</sup> Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 205. We translated from English into German.



- 5 With Alexander, we believe that none of these hypotheses apply. In 7:14 it says that these men come *out of the great tribulation*.<sup>28</sup> This multitude obviously consists of martyrs out of the great tribulation. It is questionable whether they are identical with the church of Jesus, since the 24 elders in verse 11 are mentioned as a separate entity.

(a) *The great multitude praises God: Vv 9-10*

- 10 They wear *white robes*. This symbolises their justification (see Rev 6:11). They also carry palm branches in their hands as a sign of triumph, victory and joy (compare Joh 12:13).

(b) *Praise and worship of the angels: Vv 11-12*

- 15 Compare with chapters 4 and 5: the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures are also mentioned here. The praise in verse 12 is identical with that of 5:12; the sequence of expressions only is arranged differently, and 7:12 concerns God the Father, 5:12 the Son of God.

(c) *One of the elders explains the vision to John: Vv 13-17*

**Vv 13-14:** These people have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ in the same way as all other believers. There is no other way of salvation (see for instance Joh 14:6; Act 4:12).

- 20 **V. 15:** “*Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple...*” Is this referring to the temple in Jerusalem before its destruction in the year 70 AD or to the temple of Eze 40–43? The fact that the temple which is seen by John seems to be in heaven speaks against this assumption. The descriptions in Eze 40–48 suggest that the temple seen by Ezekiel is, or shall be an earthly one.

- 25 Why is it that Rev 7 speaks of a heavenly temple, whereas Rev 21:22 mentions that in the new creation there shall be no temple anymore? Do we have to think of a symbolic temple, or is it referring to the temple of the millennium? According to Rev 20:4-6 and 5:10 Christ shall rule with his own for 1000 years on this earth. For more on this theme, turn to chapter 20. Notice the following passages where it speaks of a sanctuary or temple and the ark of his covenant in heaven: Rev 11:19; 14:15.17; 16:1.

## c.) From the seventh seal to the sixth trumpet: Chapters 8–9

### (1) Opening of the seventh seal: Chapter 8:1

- 35 “...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour”: Concerning silence, look up the following passages: Hab 2:20; Zep 1:7; Zec 2:13 and Jos 6:10. The silence points to the immediate approaching judgement. One is reminded of the proverbial “*silence before the storm*”. The opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal causes the following judgements to commence: the 7 trumpets and the 7 bowls.

### (2) The seven angels with the seven trumpets: Chapter 8:2-6

- 40 When we pray according to the Lord’s will, our prayers shall be answered, said Jesus. Our prayers are heard already today, but the answers to these prayers are not always immediately visible for us humans. Many things we will only understand and realise in the future or even in eternity. We should not take vengeance (as mentioned above) upon our enemies, but rather pray for them. This

<sup>28</sup> The Greek word θλίψις (*tribulation*) occurs often in the New Testament, but the expression “*the great tribulation*” (here ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης = *out of the great tribulation*) is used only here.

- 5 does not change the fact that God's plan includes also the judgement of the unjust. Here comes the answer to the prayers of the souls under the altar in 6:10. The text suggests that the trumpet-judgements are more severe than the seal-judgements.

### (3) The first trumpet: Chapter 8:7

A catastrophe in nature:  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the vegetation on the earth is destroyed!

### 10 (4) The second trumpet: Chapter 8:8-9

A great mountain is cast into the sea and causes another natural catastrophe.  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the sea and of all ships is destroyed. One can imagine that this leads to a lack of resources worldwide.

### (5) The third trumpet: Chapter 8:10-11

- 15 A star called "wormwood" (Greek: ὁ Ἄψινθος [*Apsynthos*], the German word *Absinth* is derived from it and it refers to a greenish liquor containing wormwood) falls upon a third of all wells and rivers and poisons the water. Drinking water becomes bitter; a further catastrophe in nature.

### (6) The fourth trumpet: Chapter 8:12-13

A further natural catastrophe: this time of cosmological dimensions:  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the stars turned dark. Compare this with Exo 10:21ff: the 9<sup>th</sup> plague over Egypt is a "three-day-darkness".

20

**V. 13:** The flying eagle, calling out a three-fold *Woe!* This means that the following judgements will increase in severity.

### (7) The fifth trumpet: Chapter 9:1-12

#### (a) *The star that opens the Abyss: Chapter 9:1-2a*

- 25 Compare with Rev 20:1-3: An angel binds Satan, the serpent! Some commentators<sup>29</sup> believe that the falling star which opens the Abyss, so that demonic beings are released to torment the unbelievers, is Satan himself. Other interpreters rather think of a heavenly angel<sup>30</sup> (one that is not fallen). Possibly the archangel Michael (see Jud 9; Rev 12:7-9; Dan 10:13; 12:1)? Whichever the case, it is God who speaks the last word! In his omnipotence and omniscience God may allow
- 30 demonic and evil powers to be set free so that at an appointed time they become instruments of judgement upon godless mankind. God still allows the devil and his angels a limited range of influence (compare Job 1-2; 2Th 2:9-12; Rev 12:12; 13:1ff).

#### (b) *Men are tormented by "locusts": Chapter 9:2b-12*

- 35 The word "like" occurs 10 times in this passage. One probably should not think literally of locusts, but with most commentators, rather of demonic beings. Speaking for this interpretation is also the fact, that the described locust-beings have a king over themselves (V. 11), which is not the case of

<sup>29</sup> So for instance John F. Walvoord, op. cit., 952 and Emil Dönges, *Was bald geschehen muß: Eine Betrachtung der Offenbarung*, 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1987), p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> So for instance Louis Bonnet, op. cit., 388 and Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 208.

5 real locusts (see Pro 30:27). For curiosity sake, here is a list of suggestions on identification that have been made by commentators of different persuasions in the course of church history:

- The Zealots in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine
- The popes and their attendants
- 10 • The Lutherans
- The armies of Mohamed
- The Mongols (armies of Genghis Khan)
- The Nazis of the Third Reich (armies of Hitler)
- The Red Army (communism)

15

With most evangelical commentators we think rather of occult powers, demons, i.e. evil spirits, fallen angels, who during the time of the great tribulation are set free from the abyss for an appointed time to torment unrepentant men (Vv 4-5). These evil spirits want to operate on earth and resist against their being locked up in the abyss (see Luk 8:31-32). Compare in this context also passages like Eph 6:10-17; 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6. This judgement will last for 5 months (Vv 5.10). It is said by the way that the life span of a locust is something like 5 months.

20

**V. 11: *Abaddon* or *Apollyon*:** *Abaddon* is derived from the Hebrew verb ‘*abed*, which can have in its root-verb of *Piel* the following meanings: *to destroy*, *to lead astray*, *to perish*. The same applies to the Greek expression *Apollyon* (derived from the Greek verb ἀπόλλυμι [*apollymi*]).

25

**V. 12:** “*The first woe is past*”: The “second woe” see 11:14 and our commentary there. The “third and last woe” see 12:12,

## (8) The sixth trumpet: Chapter 9:13-21

30

(a) *The four released angels at the river Euphrates: Vv 13-15*

This is the place where the history of mankind started and, in the end, -times this area will again be the centre of world events.

35

**V. 15:** A third of mankind will perish in this judgement. In 6:8 (4<sup>th</sup> seal) it spoke already of a quarter, but by this time more than half of mankind will have perished.

(b) *Who are the 200'000'000 in Chapter 9:16-19?*

**V. 16:** 200 million riders! Commentators are not agreed whether this refers to human armies or to demonic powers (as with the locusts of the fifth trumpet in 9:1-12).

40

The descriptions in verses 16-19 make one think rather of super natural powers than armies of men: compare 2Ki 2:11; 6:13-17; Rev 12:7 and 19:11-16. Possibly these verses should be brought in connection with passages like Rev 16:12-16; 19:11-21 and Dan 11:44, speaking of the great battle of Armageddon. With commentators like Rissi and Walvoord we think that John the seer has seen the coming of an army from the East: tanks, missiles, etc.<sup>31</sup>

45

(c) *The unrepentant survivors: Vv 20-21*

<sup>31</sup> John F. Walvoord, op. cit., p. 953, points to an article in the magazine *Time* from 21.5.1965, which states that China claims to have an army of 200 Million at its disposal.

- 5 God's judgements have the aim to lead man to repentance. Despite the severity of these judgements the survivors harden their hearts and insist in their sinfulness (V. 21). For the expression "*they refused to repent*" see 9:20.21; 16:9.11. The culmination of this hardening is seen in 16:21: after the last bowl-judgement it says: "*They cursed God on account of the plague...*"

## d.) The second parenthesis: Chapter 10:1–11:14

### 10 (1) The angel with the little scroll: Chapter 10

#### (a) *The mighty angel and the little scroll: Vv 1-7*

- 15 Who is this mighty angel? Some think of just any mighty angel (Bonnet), others think of the arch-angel Michael (Gläser, Walvoord), yet, others believe that it is Christ himself who appeared already in the time of the Old Testament as the pre-existing Son of God, sometimes called the *Angel of the Lord*.

- 20 Supporters of this interpretation (e.g. Alexander, Dönges, Seiss) point to the characteristics of this angel which remind us of Christ: Cloud, see Rev 1:7; rainbow, see Rev 4:3 (throne of God); face like the sun, see Rev 1:16; feet like bronze glowing in fire, see Rev 1:15 etc. Unger suggests a middle-position, speaking of an angel who symbolises Christ.<sup>32</sup>

- 25 **V. 2:** "*...his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land...*" This may symbolise that everything belongs to him. In verse 6 it says that this angel swears in the name of the one who created all and who lives from eternity to eternity. He then cannot be Christ himself, since according to passages like Joh 1:1-3; Col 1:15-16 and Heb 1:1-3 Christ himself has created the whole universe. Christ does not swear by his own name, but rather by the name of his Father. In that case the suggestion from Unger where the angel just symbolises Christ may not be so far off. It needs to be said though that God the Father, as the first person of the Trinity, is also involved in creation. Personally we think it quite possible that the angel here is identical with Christ swearing by his Father. One cannot swear by anyone higher than God the Father (see Heb 6:13).

- 30 **V. 2a:** "*...and he had in his hand a little opened book*": Possibly the one from chapter 5? In any case it is not (no more) sealed because God doesn't want to hide anything anymore. The content of the scroll/book is probably identical with the rest of the book of Revelation, i.e. it speaks of things that precede the end.<sup>33</sup>

- 40 **Vv 6b-7:** "*... there will be no more delay, but in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished...*" What mystery of God is this? As Alexander probably correctly remarks, it is not the incarnation of Christ (see 1Ti 3:16), nor his church (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3-5) or the rapture of the church (see 1Co 15:51), or even the mystery of lawlessness (2Th 2:7 with the Antichrist) in particular, but the totality of Christ's saving work for mankind.<sup>34</sup>

#### (b) *John takes the little scroll: Vv 8-11*

- 45 John eats the scroll: compare with Eze 2:8; Jer 15:16; Psa 19:11; 119:103. Some commentators suppose that this scroll is identical with the one of Dan 12:4.9 (Bonnet and Unger). The eating of

<sup>32</sup> See Merrill F. Unger, op. cit. p. 210. He points to Rev 5:2 und 8:3.

<sup>33</sup> See Louis Bonnet, op. cit., p. 392.

<sup>34</sup> See John H. Alexander, op. cit., p. 203.

5 the scroll symbolises the total identification of the prophet with the message received and proclaimed (see V. 11).

## (2) The temple and its measurements: Chapter 11:1-2

Chapters 11 and 12 concern particularly Israel, because the events described there take place in that region (see 11:8; 12:6.14).

### To which temple does this text refer?

Neither the temple of Solomon nor the second temple,<sup>35</sup> nor the one mentioned in Eze 40–48 is referred to here, but the so-called third temple, the temple of the great tribulation of the time of the Antichrist. The symbolic names “Sodom and Egypt” (the place where it is located) in 11:8 support this. This name is to be understood as a reproach against Jerusalem for condoning its compromises.

Some Commentators interpret this temple as the church of Jesus. Against this allegorical interpretation speak the two following facts:

1. Rev 11:8 shows that it refers to the (literal) earthly Jerusalem, the city where also our Lord was crucified. It speaks of a definite city and not of the whole world and not of the whole world-wide church.
2. The 42 months (11:2) or 1260 days (11:3) point without doubt to the time of the Antichrist. 1260 days (= 42 months) equal 3 ½ years in the Jewish calendar. One should compare this period of time also with Rev 12:6 (1260 days); 12:14 (*1 time, [2] times and ½ time*; compare this period with Dan 7:25) and 13:5 (42 months). Dan 7:25 and Rev 13:5 leave hardly any doubt that with the 3 ½ years we have a reference to the time of the Antichrist.

With many other commentators we assume, that sometime in the near future the Jews will rebuild a temple in Jerusalem on the former temple-mountain.<sup>36</sup>

- This would then be the temple to which Paul alludes in 2Th 2:4: the temple in which the Antichrist will sit in the end-time and let himself be worshipped as God (see Rev 13).<sup>37</sup>
- Compare the command to measure the temple in Rev 11:1-2 with the command to measure the temple in Eze 40–43. Some commentators want to apply the measurement of the temple allegorically to the church of Jesus (which the Lord knows exactly – therefore measurement). We point again to Rev 11:8: Jerusalem is the theme and therefore hardly the world-wide church of Jesus, but rather the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Antichrist.

The fact that the temple is trodden down and defiled for 42 months can be brought into connection with Dan 9:27 and Mat 24:15. The Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for a “year-week” but will break this covenant in the middle of the week, i.e. after 3 ½ years. Then there will be war, destruction and persecution. That the outer court is given to the gentiles and trodden down by them could actually be fulfilled in that way (as some commentators think), that the Jews enter into a compromise to allow all people and nations (→ all religions!) to enter into the court of the temple. Jerusalem, a multi-cultural and multi-religious city! In other words, at that time a kind of super-

<sup>35</sup> I.e. the one constructed by Zerubbabel (see the prophet Haggai), after the Babylonian exile and further extended by Herod.

<sup>36</sup> See Thomas S. McCall und Zola Levitt, *Satan in the Sanctuary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), passim. We have read the French version *Le troisième temple sera-t-il construit?* (Asslar: Schulte + Gerth, 1974).

<sup>37</sup> A number of commentators interpret the temple of 2Th 2:4 as well as the one of Rev 11:1-2 allegorically as the spiritual temple of the church of Jesus. The context of Rev 11 speaks against this spiritualising view.

- 5 ecumenical treaty may come into being. The thought is that the Jews would hope to *finally* find peace, which they have sought for thousands of years. But the Antichrist as mentioned before will break this treaty/covenant half way through its duration (see Dan 9:27; 12:7-11) followed by great persecutions (compare Rev 12:14; Mat 24:15ff; Luk 21:24: the time of the gentiles).
- 10 As mentioned above in our introduction to the chapters 6–19, we believe that Rev. 11:14 can be considered as a key for the question of the chronological order of the events described in these chapters. The judgement of the fifth trumpet represents the first “woe” (cf. Rev 9:12); the second “woe” coincides (according to Rev 11:14) with the end of the 3 ½-year-ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem and obviously also with the sixth trumpet. The 1260 days (= 3 ½ years)
- 15 lasting ministry of the two witnesses covers thus the complete period of the first half of the *great tribulation* (i.e. the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel). Accordingly the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15-19) would then introduce the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, i.e. the time of the great persecution which the Antichrist will launch in the end.

### (3) The two witnesses: Chapter 11:3-14

- 20 Who are these two witnesses? For “two witnesses”, see Deu 17:6; 19:15. There are a number of hypotheses as to their identity:
1. They are **Enoch and Elijah**, the only ones who did not die (see Gen 5:21-24; 1Ki 2; see also Heb 9:27). Of course at the end of time in the new covenant there will be many Christians, who
  - 25 will not see death; they shall be changed at the rapture and do not need to return to earth to die before they are resurrected (see 1Co 15:51-53; 1Th 4:15-17).
  2. They are **Moses and Elijah**: Notice the description of that time in **verses 5-6a**: concerning **Elijah**, see 1Ki 17:1; 18:1; Jam 5:17-18; 2Ki 1:10-12. Because of the prayer of Elijah it did not rain in Israel for 3 ½ years (= 1260 days) and he caused fire to fall from heaven. **V. 6b**:
  - 30 concerning **Moses**, see Exo 7:17-19 and in general the plagues against Egypt in Exo 6–10. In Mat 17:3 Moses and Elijah appear together at the transfiguration of Jesus. Compare with that Mal 4:5-6: Elijah should return before the day of the Lord (see Mat 17:10-11). Through John the Baptist the prophecy concerning Elijah's return has only been fulfilled partially (see also Mat 11:14; Joh 1:21; Luk 1:17).
  - 35 3. Or will they be **two other servants of God**, whom God authorises to do similar miraculous deeds as Moses and Elijah at their time (so say Bonnet and Unger)?

We tend towards the third proposition. In Rev 11 it says that both witnesses shall die and rise again from the dead. If one of the two witnesses should be Moses, this would imply that he will have to die a second time. Against this see Heb 9:27: “*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this [comes] judgment...*”

40

**V. 4:** Compare with Zec 4:3.11-14: Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel before the Medo-Persian Empire; here in Rev 11:4 either Moses with Elijah or two other faithful witnesses before the ruler of the revived Roman Empire at the end of time, i.e. before the Antichrist (the beast).

45

**V. 7:** The beast that comes up from the Abyss: a reference to the Antichrist (see Rev 13:1-10 and 17:8).

50 **Vv 8-13:** The fate of the two witnesses: **V. 9:** The whole earth will see their corpses: with television and internet this is no problem in our days. **Vv 11-12:** They shall rise from the dead! **V. 13:** Judgement of Jerusalem: The miracle of resurrection of the two witnesses will cause many men to fear God.

- 5 **V. 14:** With the achievement of the ministry of the two witnesses, that means with the second “woe” – as mentioned already above –, the first half of the *great tribulation* will be over.

We therefore suggest the following résumé:

- 10 **11:1-14** deals with the first half of the *great tribulation* (cf. v. 14: “*the second woe has passed*”).

**11:15-19:** The seventh trumpet coincides with the *middle* of the *great tribulation* that means it introduces the second half of the *great tribulation*. In heaven there is joy, because at that time the devil and his angels (the demons) will already be thrown out of heaven (cf. Rev 12:10-12).

- 15 **12:6-17:** Satan’s final casting out of heaven onto earth represents at the same time the third and last “woe” (see v. 12); that means it introduces the second half of the *great tribulation*.

### e.) The seventh trumpet: Chapter 11:15-19

- 20 This is another difficult passage to interpret in the book of Revelation. As one gains already the impression at the 6<sup>th</sup> seal (see above) that with this judgement the end of the world has come so also verse 15 makes one think of the end and consummation of all things. But in chapters 15 and 16 there are still the 7 bowl-judgements, which precede the glorious return of Christ (chapter 19). Why is it said here in 11:15-19 in connection with the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet, that the Lord and his anointed (Christ) have commenced their reign over the world? With Bonnet<sup>38</sup> and other commentators we favour the following interpretation:
- 25

- As the events announced through the 7 trumpets constitute the content of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal (8:1), so also the events announced by the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet herald the beginning of the final battle. This battle culminates in the fulfilment of the mysteries of God. The mighty angel from chapter 10 (Christ?) says that the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet gives the signal to the culmination (10:7). For this reason we begin with a new section in 11:15 and not in 11:19. The heavenly praise of 11:15-18 does not constitute the whole content of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet, it serves “only” as an introduction (or leading over) to the description of the great battle. The victorious outcome is celebrated in advance (proleptically). The Anointed in verse 15 is the Messiah, the Christ: see Act 4:24. This is the fulfilment of many promises of the prophets, especially Psalm 2, where God promises his Anointed: “*I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*”
- 30
- 35

- The song of triumph in 11:15-18 can be seen as an anticipation; the battles still preceding this great triumph are described in the following chapters 12 –19 and the final judgement as such is portrayed only in 20:11-15. Most probably the bowl-judgements (chapters 15–16) will last only some few days. Why? Some people will survive those judgements (cf. 16:21; 20:3) although the bowls will hit the whole world. But without drinking water men cannot survive more than a few days.
- 40

- In short: 11:15-19, i.e. the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet presents a preview of all that is still to happen until the return of Christ, in the same way as the 7<sup>th</sup> seal (8:1) contains the 7 trumpets, which follow after its opening. Unger concludes as follows:
- 45

- Verses 15 - 19 give an oversight of the rest of the book, showing future events as if they had already taken place. Seen in the foreground is the world-wide kingdom and reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world 15 - 17; the judgement of the rebellious nations at Armageddon, 18a;<sup>39</sup> the judgement of the (unbelieving) dead (20, 11 - 15), when the destroyers of the earth will
- 50

<sup>38</sup> Louis Bonnet, op. cit., pp. 397-398.

<sup>39</sup> In connection with Armageddon we point to Rev 16:12-16 und 19:11-21.

- 5 be destroyed, 18c; and the reward of the prophets and believers in their position as rulers in the messianic kingdom, 18b (20, 4 - 6).<sup>40</sup>

10 **V. 19:** The significance of these symbols (Ark of the Covenant and temple in heaven) is evident: That the temple is open means that the “most holy place” is now accessible and God is working with might. The again visible Ark of the Covenant announces the reign of the Messiah and the fulfilment of the promises of the covenant. Lightening, thunder and earthquakes are signs which announce the last judgement.<sup>41</sup> Compare the Old Testament passages Jer 3:16-17 and 31:31-34 as well as Rom 9:4-5. The Ark of the Covenant stands for the faithfulness of God. Verse 19 leads fittingly into the following chapter 12 which speaks mainly of Israel.

## f.) The third parenthesis: Chapters 12–14

- 15 After John has anticipated the end in the last verses of chapter 11 with the proclamation of the commencement of Christ’s reign blowing the last trumpet, he now describes the events which have to take place before that (chapters 12–18). The theme of the kingdom of Christ is taken up again in chapters 19–20.

### (1) The first 4 persons: the woman, the dragon, the boy-child and Michael: Ch. 12

- 20 (a) *The first Person: the woman: Vv 1-2*

Who is this woman? Basically one distinguishes between the following hypotheses:

1. Mary (the so-called catholic interpretation).  
2. The church of Jesus Christ (church).  
25 3. Israel (as nation).

(i) Mary?

The mention of the duration of *1260 days* pointing to the end-time (V. 6) and *1 time, [two] times and half a time* (V. 14) as well as the reference to “*the rest of her offspring (her seed), those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (V. 17) speak against this view.

- 30 (ii) The Church of Jesus?

No, because it is the woman who gives birth to the boy-child and not the other way around. The church has not given birth to Jesus, it is rather Christ who gave (and gives) life to the church.

(iii) Israel?

- 35 With many commentators we believe that this is the only interpretation which does justice to the whole context of the chapter:

- The 12 stars (V. 1) represent the 12 tribes of Israel (see Gen 37:9 and Rev 7:1-8).
- In the Old Testament Israel is often referred to as “woman” or spouse/bride of God (see for instance Isa 47:7-9; 54:1-5; Hos 1–2).
- 40 • Verses 13-17: The persecution of the woman can be applied to the persecution of Israel through the Antichrist during the great tribulation (see Dan 7:25; 9:27; Mat 24:15). It is Satan, (the dragon), who gives power to the Antichrist, i.e. the beast (cf. Rev 13:4-5; compare 2Th 2:9-12).

<sup>40</sup> Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., pp. 214-215. We translated from German into English.

<sup>41</sup> Compare also Louis Bonnet, op. cit., p. 399.



5 (b) *The second person: the red dragon: Vv 3-4*

The dragon is identified with the old serpent (V. 9)! This is Satan. In Gen 3:1, in the first book of the Bible, the serpent is mentioned for the first time. Here, in the last book, the book of consummation which speaks of the end-time, Satan is called symbolically *the old serpent*. The colour *red* or *fiery-red* (Greek: *πυρρός*) is an allusion to the fact that Satan was a murderer from the beginning (i.e. since the time of first man – see Gen 3 and Joh 8:44). The seven heads and ten horns are also quoted in connection with the beast in Rev 13:1 and 17:10-12. These passages again refer back to Dan 7:7-8 (the fourth of four beasts, which Daniel saw in his vision) where the context (vision of the statue in Dan 2) suggests the end-phase of the Roman Empire symbolised by the 10 horns (more in chapter 17). The crowns are a symbol of authority and power to reign: this also applies to Satan, who is called the *prince of this world* (Joh 12:31 etc.).

**V. 4:** “*His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth...*” With other exegetes we believe that this is an allusion to the fall of Satan after his rebellion against God. Indirect passages pointing to the fall of Satan: see Isa 14:12-14 and Eze 28:12-15. From verse 9 we conclude that the “*third of the stars*” refers to the other fallen angels (i.e. demons). If that is so, then this would mean that a third of the angels have followed Satan in his rebellion against God (compare in this context Jude 6 and 2Pe 2:4). Probably at that time a part of these fallen angels were “imprisoned” in the abyss (Jud 6; and Isa 24:21-22), whereas the other part works evil on this earth and in heavenly realms since that event (see Eph 2:2; 6:12). It is already noted here that verses 7-9 do not speak of the same event we are looking at here (i.e. the beginning of creation), but rather of the end-time, i.e. the time of the Antichrist.

(c) *The third person: the boy-child Vv 4b-5*

Here the commentators agree: Christ is the boy-child. The following is stated (or alluded to) concerning him:

**V. 4b:** The dragon tries to devour the male-child. Compare with Mat 2:16: through Herod; Mat 4:1-11: Satan himself through temptation; Luk 22:39-46: in Gethsemane.

**V. 5a:** Allusion to his birth.

**V. 5b:** He will rule over all nations “*with an iron sceptre*”: see Psa 2:8-9; Rev 2:27; 19:15.

**V. 5c:** Allusion to his ascension (after his resurrection).

(d) *The dragon fights against Israel: Vv 6.13-17*

40 Certainly, Satan has always tried to destroy Israel, but at the end of time his attacks will increase.

**Vv 6.14:** The duration of this time of persecution: 1260 days or *one time, [two] times and a half time*, i.e. 3 ½ years. This refers to the second half of the so-called great tribulation.

45 **V. 14:** “*...the woman was given the two wings...*”: compare Exo 19:4: God has carried Israel on wings like eagles saving them from Egypt (Exodus). Some commentators suggest that the desert here may be identical to the region of Edom of old. Compare the mention of Judea in connection with the persecution of Israel in the end time in Mat 24:15-22.

50 **V. 15:** “*...from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman...*”: Unger thinks that the *torrent of water* refers to the nations who want to destroy Israel. Compare with Dan 11:41-45: the attack of the kings (for us the Antichrist) upon Israel, the *beautiful land*. That “*waters*” may stand symbolically for the nations is also seen in Rev 17:1.15 (compare Psa 65:8).

**V. 16:** “*But the earth helped the woman...*”: Could this be an allusion to countries supporting Israel? Maybe one has to think rather of phenomena in nature or miracles of God.

**V. 17:** “*Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring...*”: Unger thinks, that *the rest of her offspring* refers to faithful Jews, whereas Alexander holds, that one has to think of believers during the great tribulation or martyrs of the time of the Antichrist. The latter seems more probable to us, as it is said of them that *they hold the testimony of Jesus*. So we think that it can hardly refer to Jews.<sup>42</sup> Israel as a nation will only repent at the return of Christ (see Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7).

**V. 18:** “*And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea*”: This verse belongs already to chapter 13.

(e) *The fourth person: the [arch]angel Michael: Vv 7-9*

The archangel at war with Satan and his angels (see also Jude 9). Mentioning the angel Michael as protector of Israel, see also Dan 10:13-21 and 12:1. After his fall (Isa 14 and Eze 28), the devil still had access (within limits) to heaven (see Job 1:6; 2:1; Eph 2:2; 6:10-12). In the middle (or at the end? v. 12b speaks rather for the middle) of the great tribulation, the devil with his angels is finally thrown to the earth (not to be able to accuse the children of God anymore Vv 11-12). Jesus in his omniscience knew this ahead of the time when he prophesied this event to the disciples (Luk 10:18).

(f) *Joy in heaven after the fall of Satan: Vv 10-12*

**V. 10:** Satan is the accuser of the *brethren* (i.e. the believers): compare with Job 1:9-11; Zec 3:1.

**V. 11:** The basis or the means of our victory over Satan is the blood of Christ: compare Rom 3:25; 5:9; Col 2:14-15; Heb 10:10.14.

**V. 12:** As the proverb says: *What is joy to the one is sorrow to the other*. Satan knows that he has not much time left (see 10:6; 11:14; 12:12). With passages like Job 1–2 this reference is of great significance for Angelology (doctrine of angels): the power of Satan is limited in scope and duration. The day will come when his activities come to an end. What encouragement and comfort for suffering and tempted children of God (see also Eph 6:12-17; Rom 8:38-39; Joh 10:28-29).

## (2) The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> person: the Antichrist and the False Prophet: Chapter 13

(a) *The fifth person: the Antichrist: Vv 1-10*

The Antichrist is, one could put it that way, the second person of the so-called satanic triad. In Rev 16:13 all three of them are named:

**12:3-4:** Satan, the dragon: compare with Joh 8:44, where Jesus calls him the father of lies.

**13:1-10:** The Antichrist, the first beast coming out of the sea, is called by Paul in 2Th 2:3 the **son** of perdition.

**13:11-18:** The False Prophet is the **spirit of lies** (see 1Jo 4:1-3), who causes men to worship the dragon and the beast or the Antichrist.

<sup>42</sup> It is understood of course that since Pentecost again and again individual Jews have been converted to their Messiah. But then these Jews belong to the church of Jesus which consists of gentiles and Jews (see Rom 9–11 and Eph 2:14).

5

**V. 1a:** “*And I saw a beast coming out of the sea*”: This could refer to the nations: see Rev 17:15. Rev 11:7 is the only passage that suggests a kind of satanic incarnation, when it says, that the beast comes out of the abyss, but this is only speculation (more to that theme later).

10

**V. 1b:** *10 horns*: see Dan 7:7-8 and Rev 17:7.12 compare with the *[10] toes* in the vision of the statue in Dan 2:33.41-43. *7 heads and 10 horns with 10 crowns*: From Dan 7:24-28 and Rev 17:12 it is seen that this must be a kingdom because the 10 horns represent, according to Rev 17:12, kings. The *beast* itself is the leader of this kingdom and we think that it is identical with the *little horn* of Dan 7:8.21.24-25.

15

**V. 2:** The enumeration of these animals doubtless refers back to Dan 7:4-5; i.e. the three kingdoms that precede the Roman Empire (symbolised by the fourth animal with the iron teeth). It is interesting that the animals are enumerated in the opposite sequence! The dragon is the one, who gives power and authority to the beast. Compare this with 2Th 2:9-11, where Paul writes that Satan gives power to the *lawless one* (the Antichrist).

20

**Vv 3-4:** The beast is healed from a mortal wound: Maybe this has to be seen in reference to Rev 17:8: “*...the beast which once was and now is not [anymore, because it was mortally wounded] and will come up from the abyss...*” The Roman Empire will be “resurrected” again and the Antichrist will be its leader. More concerning this follows in chapter 17.

25

**V. 5:** During the 42 months, i.e. the second half of the great tribulation, the beast will show its true colours, when it will blaspheme (God): compare in this connection with Dan 7:8.11.25; 8:25; 9:27; 11:36-37 and 2Th 2:3-4.

30

**Vv 6-10:** The Antichrist will persecute the saints of that time (see Dan 7:21.25; 8:25).

**(b)      The sixth person: the False Prophet: Vv 11-18**

35

**V. 11a:** “*Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth...*”: Compare this with Rev 13:1, where it says that the first beast comes out from the sea, like mentioned above with Rev 17:15 (and also Dan 7:2: the great sea probably represents the nations) out from the nations. Some commentators consider the possibility that the Antichrist will come from the nations (coming out from the sea), whereas the False Prophet is to come from Israel (coming out of the earth<sup>43</sup>). Concerning the *Promised Land* for Israel, see Gen 13:16-17. This is only a speculative hypothesis.

40

**V. 11b:** “*...two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon*”: Compare this with Mat 7:15; 2Co 11:13-15.

45

**Vv 12-14a:** As prophet this beast will command that all men have to worship the first beast (the Antichrist). To reach this goal it will do great miracles to lead men astray (see 2Th 2:9-12). Verse 13 (fire from heaven) reminds us of Elijah and the two witnesses in Rev 11:5 (see above).

50

**Vv 14b-15:** “*...to worship the image of the beast...*”: Compare with the idolatry of the golden calf in Exo 32 and the statue in Dan 3. As already mentioned, Paul also speaks (in 2Th 2:4) of the fact that the Antichrist will demand to be worshiped as god. “*...so that the image speaks...*”: In our times of information technology and television some commentators consider that this could mean that the Antichrist will address mankind through television or internet. Possible, but this also is speculation. “*...and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed*”: Nothing new under

<sup>43</sup> The word earth can be seen in connection with the Hebrew word אֶרֶץ (*aeraets* = *earth, land*) which may stand for the *Promised Land*.

5 the sun: the same was experienced by believers at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the neo-Babylonian Empire, who demanded from all men to bow before a statue; otherwise they would be thrown into the fiery furnace (see Dan 3:6).

10 **Vv 16-17:** During the time of the Antichrist it will be demanded to wear the sign of the beast on the forehead or the right hand. This was already practised at the time of the Roman emperors with their soldiers and slaves. Under the Antichrist in the end-times, it will again be similar. Men will either wear the sign of the beast (followers of the Antichrist) or the sign of Christ (the saints). Some decades ago, one could not really imagine a sign like this and no one being able to *buy or to sell*. In our age of electronics these verses don't sound strange anymore. The news of a couple in the US  
15 who were the first to have a chip with all their personal data implanted was not so much a surprise for believers as for those who are ignorant of the biblical message. The vision of George Orwell's *big brother's watching you* in "1984" should not be brushed aside as fantastic fiction. As Daniel and his friends, the believers will be oppressed during this time (see Dan 3).

20 **V. 18:** The number of the beast: 666. This number has caused much ink to flow, possibly too much. Several interpretations have already been suggested.<sup>44</sup> Some are extremely speculative others are worthy to be mentioned. We enumerate some hypotheses<sup>45</sup> and then we dare to say which one seems personally most "attractive" to us (or most probable?).

25 • The addition of the first six Roman numerals amounts to 666:

	<b>I</b>	1
	<b>V</b>	5
	<b>X</b>	10
30	<b>L</b>	50
	<b>C</b>	100
	<b>D</b>	<u>500</u>
		<b>666</b>

35 From this it was concluded that the Antichrist must be a Roman emperor.

• If **A = 100**, **B = 101**, **C = 102** etc., then:

	<b>H</b>	107
40	<b>I</b>	108
	<b>T</b>	119
	<b>L</b>	111
	<b>E</b>	104
	<b>R</b>	<u>117</u>
45		<b>666</b>

So it was concluded that Hitler must be the Antichrist!<sup>46</sup>

50 • If one takes the Hebrew letters<sup>47</sup> of the title of the emperor Nero (**KSR NRON**), the addition of these also amounts to 666:

<sup>44</sup> We mention in this connection that some manuscripts do not have the number 666, but 616 or 665.

<sup>45</sup> Compare with John H. Alexander, op. cit., pp. 261-264.

<sup>46</sup> It is to be admitted that the things which Hitler did, gave at least a foretaste of what will happen during the time of the Antichrist.

<sup>47</sup> In the Hebrew language only the consonants, whereas our letter **O** equals the Hebrew letter **Waw**, which is the sixth letter in the Hebrew alphabet having the numerical value of 6.

5	<b>K</b> ( <i>Kaph</i> )	100
	<b>S</b> ( <i>Samech</i> )	60
	<b>R</b> ( <i>Reš</i> )	200
	<b>N</b> ( <i>Nun</i> )	50
	<b>R</b> ( <i>Reš</i> )	200
10	<b>O</b> ( <i>Waw</i> )	6
	<b>N</b> ( <i>Nun</i> )	<u>50</u>
		<b>666</b>

15 Nero was one of the worst persecutors of Jews and even more so of Christians. Therefore commentators often equated the beast and Nero or saw in him at least a herald of the Antichrist.

- The Greek word θηρίον (= *beast*) occurs in the book of Revelation (where, as already stated, it represents the Antichrist) 36 times. This gave cause to the following speculation: 6 squared equals 36; if all numbers from 1 to 36 are added it also equals 666:  $1+2+3+4+5+6+...+36 = 666!$

20 It is easy and tempting to speculate with numbers. In our opinion this is not wrong as long as one does not fall into the trap of considering “his or her” hypothesis (or rather cleverly thought out scheme) as an absolute. Because this mistake has frequently been made by commentators many believers are a priori sensitive to all questions of interpretation in the book of Revelation. These on the other hand have to ask themselves if this can be supported in the face of the words in Rev 13:13. There it says: “*If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast...*” It should be noted that in the book of Revelation many numbers have obviously a symbolic meaning.

30 With other exegetes<sup>48</sup> we tend rather to the following interpretation: Here in verse 18 it says that the number of the beast is a *man’s number*. 666 is the number of man.

35 Man was created on the 6<sup>th</sup> day (Gen 1:26-27.31); God commanded man to work on 6 days (Exo 20:9); to approach the throne of Solomon one had to ascend 6 steps (1Ki 10:10). Solomon made shields of gold, 600 shekels each (1Ki 10:16); he imported chariots from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver (1Ki 10:29) and each year 666 talents of gold came to Jerusalem (1Ki 10:14). The statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar was 60 feet high and 6 feet wide.<sup>49</sup>

40 Number 6 is the number of man and points to his limitations, number 7 on the other hand is the divine number; symbolising perfection and completion: 7 churches, 7 spirits, the Lamb with 7 horns and 7 eyes, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls, 7 angels... The Antichrist, the son of perdition (2Th 2:3), will go so far as to accept divine worship (as the Roman emperors did already!). It is interesting that in the passage 2Th 2:3-4, dealing with the Antichrist, Paul describes him (maybe not by accident) with six different terms. Even though being man the Antichrist will claim divinity. Satan will help this son of perdition to rise. In Rev 13, the phrase “*he was given*” occurs six times. 45 Lucifer wanted to be like God (see Isa 14:14). After his fall, he tempted man to commit the same sin, wanting to be like God (see Gen 3). The sin of mankind will culminate in the claim of the Antichrist, to be God. God resists the proud (Jam 4:6). He hates pride and self-exaltation of man. Humility is the greatest virtue (compare with Mic 6:8 and Jam 4:10). Is humbleness not a reasonable attitude of the creature before his creator? Anything else is simply illusionary arrogance of a created being. 50

Why is the number of the beast a three-digit number? Here also we can only surmise. Rev 16:13 seems to point to a satanic triad: The dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist) and the False Prophet (False Prophet). They all are powerful as it is shown particularly in Rev 13. But all three are not

<sup>48</sup> Compare John F. Walvoord, op. cit., p. 963.

<sup>49</sup> Compare John H. Alexander, op. cit., p. 263.

5 omnipotent; they are able to act within the limits given by God (see again Rev 12:12 and Job 1–2). The number which precedes the number 7, i.e. the number of perfection, is the number 6. For each person of the satanic triad the number 6 applies, whereas for each person of the divine Trinity the number of perfection, i.e. number 7, applies. We are reminded of the Lamb with 7 horns (omnipotence) and 7 eyes (omniscience). The 7 eyes again correspond with the 7 spirits (Rev 5:6),  
 10 which also points to the perfection of the Spirit of God (compare the 7 attributes of the Spirit in Isa 11:2). Rev 1:4-5 alludes to all three persons of the divine Trinity. The three-digit 666 stands against the three-digit 777. Satan and his helpers are powerful, but the triune God is mightier, he is omnipotent.<sup>50</sup>

### (3) The seventh person: the Lamb with the redeemed: Chapter 14:1-5

15 Compare these 144'000 with those of 7:1-8. To whom do the 144'000 refer here? There are again different suggestions:

(a) *The 144'000 are Jews in Jerusalem and in Israel in the millennium*

Commentators,<sup>51</sup> who identify these 144'000 (as those of 7:1-8) with Jews, believe that this passage is a vision of the coming kingdom of Christ on earth (see Psa 2:6-8). Walvoord says:

20 It is reasonable to conclude that this is the same group mentioned in 7:4-8, except that here they are in a later period of the Tribulation. Chronologically the vision anticipates the triumph of the 144,000 still intact at the time of Jesus Christ's return from heaven to earth.<sup>52</sup>

25 Contrary to this view one may object that Israel according to the flesh (the natural Israel as a nation) is not believing and not without fault, because they reject the Lamb until today. As a nation Israel will repent only when Christ comes back again (see Rom 11:25-27; cf. Zec 12:10).

(b) *The 144'000 are Jews in the heavenly Jerusalem*

30 Supporters of this hypothesis say, this is a description of the reward which the 144'000 Israelites of 7:1-8 (on earth) will receive in eternity. Against this proposition the same objection may be raised as the one against the above-mentioned hypothesis.

(c) *144'000 out of the nations in the heavenly Zion*

35 The 144'000 are identified with the church, which rests with the Lamb, i.e. in heaven with the Lord.<sup>53</sup> That these verses here, in contrast to 7:1-8, refer to Christians and not to Jews (i.e. Israel as a nation) is suggested especially in verse 4: *they follow the Lamb*. Only Christians are doing that. Israel as a nation will do it when Jesus returns (Rom 11:25-27). Commentators in whose  
 40 eschatological scheme Israel does not play a major role tend to interpret the 144'000 in this passage as well as the ones in 7:1-8 as being the church of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> We rather see in the 144'000 in 7:1-8 coming from the 12 tribes the nation Israel (during the great tribulation) and in those of 14:1-5 Christians. Whether this signifies the full number of the church of Jesus of all times or only the Christian martyrs of the great tribulation, remains a matter of conjecture.

(d) *The 144'000 are Christians reigning on the earthly mount Zion*

<sup>50</sup> The Greek word παντοκράτωρ (*Pantokrátōr* = *the almighty*) occurs 10 times in the New Testament; 9 times in Revelation, otherwise only once with Paul in 2Co 6:18.

<sup>51</sup> So for instance the dispensationalist Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>52</sup> John F. Walvoord, op. cit., pp. 963-964.

<sup>53</sup> So for instance G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1297.

<sup>54</sup> So for instance Louis Bonnet, op. cit., pp. 408-409.

5 The resurrected Christians (cf. 1Co 15:23-24; Rev 2:26-27; 20:4-6) will reign with their Lord on earth (Rev 5:10). As already explained above, under *position (c)*, only Christians can be called *followers of the Lamb*. We therefore surmise that these 144'000 represent either Christians in their perfection in eternity (new creation) or on the earthly Zion (cf. Isa 24:23; 25:6-8; 27:12-13) during the millennium.

10

**V. 4:** “*These are those who did not defile themselves with women*”: With many interpreters we surmise that this refers to *spiritual purity*, which is in Scripture (A.T. and N.T.) often symbolised by virginity: Cf. 2Ki 19:21; Isa 37:22; Jer 18:13; 31:4.21; Lam 2:13; Amo 5:2; 2Co 6:14-18; 11:2; Eph 5:27; Rev 21:2.9-10.27; 22:3.

#### 15 **(4) The three angels who announce judgement: Chapter 14:6-13**

##### (a) *The 1<sup>st</sup> angel: The proclamation of the eternal gospel: Vv 6-7*

What stands out in these verses is that again angels (see verse 6) proclaim the Word of God. This also happened in Old Testament times: God has spoken in many ways. In the past he spoke often through angels and especially through the Angel of the Lord (see for instance Gen 19:1.15).  
 20 Through angels the law was given (Act 7:53; Gal 3:19). Today, in the age of the church, God uses men to proclaim his word. The fact that in the time mentioned here, the Word of God is again proclaimed by angels, convinces the pretribulationists (rapture before the great tribulation) strongly that at this time the church will already have been taken up to be with the Lord.

##### (b) *The 2<sup>nd</sup> angel: Announcement of the fall of Babylon: V. 8*

25 The fall of the prostitute Babylon is described in detail in chapters 17–18 (see 18:2). Chronologically this vision is to be placed in 16:19 and 19:11-21.

##### (c) *The 3<sup>rd</sup> angel: Announcement of eternal punishment and reward: Vv 9-13*

**Vv 9-11:** Here the angel describes the eternal punishment (pain) of those who have accepted the sign of the beast (the Antichrist). This will be the final fate of unbelievers (see Rev 20:14-15).  
 30 Notice verse 11, where the harshness and eternal duration (forever and ever; in Greek “*from ages to ages*”, twice a plural!) of this judgement is clearly emphasised. Compare this with the picture of unquenchable fire in Isa 66:24, to which Jesus also refers (Mar 9:48). The fact that there will be eternal condemnation out of which there is no escape should encourage us to a sympathetic life-style towards unbelievers, the lost.

35

Jude (a brother of the Lord: see Mat 13:55) challenges (in his letter: v. 23) the believers to snatch the lost out of the fire.

**Vv 12-13:** The angels also proclaim the reward of those who belong to Christ; V. 13b: “*...their deeds will follow them...*”: compare this with the theme of reward for believers at the judgement seat of Christ in 2Co 5:10; 1Co 3:11-15 and Heb 4:10.

40

#### **(5) The harvest and the gathering of grapes: Chapter 14:14-20**

This section gives an insight into the time and events which are related in Rev 19:11-21 (also 16:12-16), i.e. the time when the Lord appears (returns) with his heavenly army to defeat his  
 45 opponent and to judge the nations. Harvesting grain and gathering of grapes are pictures of this judgement.

5 (a) *The harvest: Vv 14-16*

**V. 14:** The one seated on the clouds, like a Son of Man, is Christ who will judge the world: compare with Rev 1:7.13; Dan 7:13; Mat 24:30.

- He is the Son of Man: see Rev 1:13; Mat 24:27.
- 10 • He will judge: Mat 25:31-32; 2Ti 4:1.
- The Father places the judgement in his hands, because he is the Son of Man: Joh 5:27-29.

15 He became man to redeem us (see Phi 2:5-10; 2Co 8:9; Heb 2:14-18; 4:14-16). God became man. In order to pay for the sin of the first Adam and to redeem us from verdict of condemnation, he became man, the so-called second Adam (see 1Co 15:45ff and Rom 5:12-21). In Jesus, God offers his gracious hand of salvation. He who rejects Jesus the Son of Man as saviour will have to meet him as the judge of the world.

- His crown: compare Rev 19:12.
- 20 • The sharp sickle: this is a symbol of judgement; compare with Joe 3:13 (in other translations 4:13) and Mat 13:39.

25 Those who harvest are the angels (see v. 19). According to verse 16, it seems that Christ also is harvesting: see Rev 19:20 and 2Th 2:8: Christ himself will judge the Antichrist and the False Prophet. This should be compared with the harvest that was announced by John the Baptist (Luk 3:17). Jesus himself gives an explanation in the parable of the weeds and the wheat (Mat 13:24-30).

(b) *The gathering of grapes: Vv 17-20*

30 The image of the gathering of grapes and the winepress: see Isa. 63:1-6 (also Deu 32:32-35; Joe 3:12-13 [other translation 4:12-13] and Zec 14:4-13).

“1600 stadia” are ca. 300 km, which amount roughly to the length of the land of Israel (North-South, i.e. from *Dan to Beersheba*).

35 The third parenthesis ends here, and the chronology of judgement continues. The last judgements follow now: the 7 bowls.

## **g.) The seven bowls: Chapters 15–16**

### **(1) The seven angels with the seven bowls: Chapter 15**

(a) *The vision of the seven angels with the seven bowls: V. 1*

40 How is it that this sign is called *great* and *marvellous*? It is because these judgements (or punishments) are an expression of the perfect justice of a God who is great and marvellous. In the same way as atonement had to be fulfilled (Joh 19:30), so also the wrath of God. While the gospels tell of the fulfilment of salvation, Revelation testifies to the fulfilment of judgement.

(b) *Those who overcame the beast sing of their victory: Vv 2-4*

45 **V. 2:** “*The Sea of Glass*”: compare with Rev 4:6 and Exo 24:10. “*Those who had been victorious over the beast...*”, i.e. those who come out of the great tribulation (see Rev 7:14-16; 13:7.15). “*They held harps...*”: These symbolise *joy and triumph*.



5

**Vv 3-4:** “*The song of Moses*”: What song is referred to here? There are interesting similarities between the passages Exo 15:1-18 (Israel saved through the Red Sea) and Deu 32:1.43 (song of Moses at the end of his life) on the one side and Rev 15:3-5 on the other side. Comparisons:

10	Exo 15:11	with	Rev 15:3b
	Exo 15:18	with	Rev 15:3c
	Exo 15:1	with	Rev 15:4a
	Exo 15:13	with	Rev 15:4b
	Deu 32:4	with	Rev 15:3
15	Deu 32:43	with	Rev 15:4

“*The song of the Lamb*”: It is possible that this refers to the song of Rev 5:9-10.

(c) *The appearance of the 7 angels with the seven bowls: Vv 5-8*

**V. 5:** “*The temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony*”: compare this with Rev 11:19 and Heb 8:5. It could be that this is a symbol for the “most holy place” in heaven.

These last judgements (11:19 to 18:24) proceed from the sanctuary of God (Vv 5-6). The clothes of the angels are white (*clean, shining linen*). In biblical language white colour stands for *righteousness* and *purity*. It may well be that this description of clothes (V. 6) is an allusion to the fact, that the deeds (and so also the judgements) of God are righteous and just (see V. 4). Golden bowls are actually equipment belonging to the service in the temple. Maybe they represent the perfect (7 bowls) wrath of God (all patience knows an end!). One of the four living creatures (compare these in Rev 4:6-11) gives the bowls to the angels (V. 7). So they are included in the implementation of judgement (see Eze 10:6-7).

30

**V. 8:** The smoke filling the temple may point to the glory or to the wrath of God: compare with 1Ki 8:10-11; Exo 19:18; Psa 18:9.

## (2) The seven bowls of the wrath of God are poured out: Chapter 16

There are interesting parallels between the plagues described here and the 10 plagues at the occasion of the exodus of Israel from Egypt in Exo 7–10:

35

<u>Revelation 16</u>	<u>Kind of plague</u>	<u>Exodus 7–10</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> bowl	boils	6 <sup>th</sup> plague on Egypt (Exo 9:8-12)
2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> bowl	water changed into blood	1 <sup>st</sup> plague on Egypt (Exo 7:14-25)
4 <sup>th</sup> bowl	men are scorched	—
45 5 <sup>th</sup> bowl	darkness	9 <sup>th</sup> plague on Egypt (Exo 10:21-23)
6 <sup>th</sup> bowl	frogs	2 <sup>nd</sup> plague on Egypt (Exo 7:26–8:7)
7 <sup>th</sup> bowl	hail	7 <sup>th</sup> plague on Egypt (Exo 9:13-26)

50

Then God punished Pharaoh, because he (and his people) mistreated Israel. In the same way he will punish the Antichrist and his followers in the whole world because they persecute his chosen ones.

5 There is another parallel to be noticed: The bowl-judgements in chapter 16 and the trumpet-judgements in chapters 8–9 hit the same objects:

1 <sup>st</sup> trumpet (8:7)	⇒	the earth	1 <sup>st</sup> bowl (16:2)
2 <sup>nd</sup> trumpet (8:8-9)	⇒	the sea	2 <sup>nd</sup> bowl (16:3)
10 3 <sup>rd</sup> trumpet (8:10-11)	⇒	the rivers	3 <sup>rd</sup> bowl (16:4-7)
4 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (8:12-13)	⇒	the sun	4 <sup>th</sup> bowl (16:8-9)
5 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (9:1-12)	⇒	the throne of the beast	5 <sup>th</sup> bowl (16:10-11)
6 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (9:13-21)	⇒	the Euphrates	6 <sup>th</sup> bowl (16:12-16)
15 7 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (11:15-19)	⇒	the whole planet	7 <sup>th</sup> bowl (16:17-21)

15 It has to be noticed that the plagues in Rev 16 are apparently more severe as the previous ones (a progressive worsening of the judgements): The trumpet-judgements affect a third of the world (see Rev 8:7), a third of the animals in the seas (8:9), a third of the rivers (8:11), a third of the sun (8:12) and a third of mankind (9:16-18), whereas the bowl-judgements affect the whole earth.<sup>55</sup>

20

**V. 1:** This voice is probably the one of Christ (see also Rev 5:5; 6:1 and Joh 5:27).

(a) *The first bowl: V. 2*

Men who carry the sign of the beast are beaten with ugly and painful sores (see Rev 13:16-17 and Exo 9:8-12).

25

(b) *The second bowl: V. 3*

The sea is turned into blood. Whereas at the second trumpet (8:8-9) only a third of the sea is affected, here it hits the whole sea (in Greek, *sea* singular).

(c) *The third bowl: Vv 4-7*

30 Rivers and wells turn into blood. No more drinking water! Verses 6-7 remind us of passages like Gal 6:7; Gen 9:6 and Num 35:33. We are reminded of the prayer of the martyrs in Rev 6:9-10.

(d) *The fourth bowl: Vv 8-9*

35 A terrible scorching heat of the sun: It is not elaborated whether this is a cosmic catastrophe or “only” a climatic one. New discoveries in space show that there can be a connection between the two (gigantic explosions on the sun do affect the climate on earth). To be up to date one could also refer to the destruction of the ozone-layer. Compare with this plague Mal 3:19 (other translations 4:1) and Luk 21:25.

40 **V. 9:** The punishment should lead to repentance. One may be astonished that men can be so hardened that they would not repent even at this point. For the words “*they refused to repent...*” see Rev 9:20.21 and 16:9.11. In this respect the climax is found in the statement in 16:21, where men instead of repenting rather cursed God on account of the inflicted plague. This is indeed the climax of stubbornness and hardening of the heart.

(e) *The fifth bowl: Vv 10-11*

45 The throne of the beast is surrounded with darkness: Darkness in the context of judgement, see Zep 1:5 and Joe 3:4 (other translations 3:21). Compare with the darkness in Egypt Exo 10:21-23. “*The throne of the beast*”: With Bonnet and others we interpret this to mean Rome, respectively the whole kingdom of the Antichrist (Rev 13:1-2 and chapter 17).

<sup>55</sup> Compare with John H. Alexander, op. cit., pp. 286-287.

5 (f) *The sixth bowl: Vv 12-16*

The Euphrates dries up and can easily be crossed (see Euphrates in 9:14-15). The Euphrates is first mentioned in connection with the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:14). In older times the river was held to be the border between West and East. In antiquity the Euphrates was a natural barrier to protect the West against invasions from the Orient. In the end-times armies from the East will cross the Euphrates and invade Israel. This will be the fulfilment of prophecies like Dan 11:40-45; Isa 11:15-16; Jer 51:13.36; Hes 38 to 39 (Gog and Magog); Zec 10:10-12; 14:2 etc.

**V. 13a:** The satanic triad as source of all wars (see verse 16).

15 **Vv 13b-14:** “...three evil spirits that looked like frogs . . . they are the spirits of demons...” Concerning spirits that perform signs and wonders; compare with the *lying spirits* in 1Ki 22:20-28 (cf. 2Th 2:9-12).

20 **V. 15:** The continuation of verse 14 follows in verse 16. The beatitude in verse 15 interrupts the description of the judgement of the sixth bowl, but the interruption is intentional. It contains a message: The judgement is coming and will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. Persevere in faith, so as not to come into judgement.

25 **V. 16:** This is the only Bible reference where the term Armageddon occurs; it stems from the Hebrew *Har* (= *mountain*) and *Megiddo* (a place respectively a plain where armies confronted each other; for instance 2Ch 35:22). There the armies of the nations will confront each other before the return of Christ. No details of events are given in this place. We find these in the passage 19:11-21 which takes place at the same time (return of Christ and battle). Probably pointing to the same events are the following passages in the Old Testament: Dan 11:40-45; Joe 3:11-16 (or 4:11-16) and Zec 14:4ff.

(g) *The seventh bowl: Vv 17-21*

35 **V. 17:** “*He poured out his bowl into the air*”: i.e. the sphere where Satan dominates; according to Eph 2:2 Satan is the ruler of the air. “*It is done*” (perfect): Even though the event is still in the future the verb stands in the perfect tense. One could speak of a prophetic perfect. For God, who is eternal, even the things and events which still lie in the future are as if they had already happened. So it can be said of the coming creation, i.e. the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:6): Γέγοναν (*gégonan*: = perfect plural of γίνομαι [*gínomai*] = *to become*), i.e.: *it has happened* or literally: *they have happened*. When God says that this or that will take place, then it is of such certainty for his prophets that they may not express it with verbs in the future tense (so-called *futura*), but they can do it as well in the perfect tense. This applies especially to the prophets of the Old Testament. One speaks therefore of the so-called *perfectum propheticum*.

45 **V. 18:** “*There was a severe earthquake*”: see Zec 14:4-5: The Mount of Olives near Jerusalem will split in two at the return of Christ.

50 **V. 19:** “*The great city split into three parts*”: Commentators are not agreed whether this applies to Jerusalem or to Babylon. As to the fall of Babylon compare 18:2.10.21. The great city here probably refers to Jerusalem: compare 11:2.8; see also Zec 12:3; 13:8; 14:2.4.7. “*God remembered Babylon the Great*”: A detailed description of Babylon and its fall and destruction follows in chapters 17–18.

**V. 20:** “*And every island fled away*”: At that time *islands* often referred to far (heathen) countries. “*And the mountains could not be found*”: We leave it open whether this refers literally to *mountains*, or if these *mountains* represent leading nations. We refer to Rev 17:9 (where it deals

5 with the beast and the prostitute Babylon), where kings respectively their kingdoms are spoken of as *mountains*. As to the disappearance of the islands and mountains compare also 6:14ff.

**V. 21:** “*Huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each*”: This amounts to something like 50 kg. Compare the hail in 11:19. Also Egypt was visited by hail (Exo 9:24-25).

## 10 **h.) The judgement of Babylon: Chapters 17–18**

These chapters enlarge on the events told in 14:8 and 16:19.

### **(1) The system of the prostitute Babylon: Chapter 17:1-6**

*Babel* (derived of which is Babylon) means *confusion, to confuse* and appears in Gen 10:10 and 11:9 for the first time in the Bible. In Gen 11:9 (building of the tower of Babel) it says: “*That is why it was called Babel; because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world.*” Sometime after the flood, men built a tower in Babel in order to erect a monument for themselves (Gen 11:4) and to avoid being spread over the whole earth; and this, against the will of God. After the judgement of the confusion of languages Babylon became something like a symbol of man’s rebellion against God. One speaks of Babylon as the cradle of witchcraft, idolatry and polytheism. In the Old Testament, to turn away from the true and only God to other gods was also described as prostitution (see for instance Nah 3:4-5). God speaks of his people in the picture of his *wife*. When Israel fell more and more into idolatry and the worshipping of many gods, the Lord accused them of unfaithfulness and prostitution (see Hos 1–2). Religious unfaithfulness is therefore also called spiritual prostitution. So the “prostitute” symbolises in the book of Revelation (see *Jezebel* in Rev 2:20) a false religious system, which blasphemes the true God and persecutes the believers (compare 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:2). In the same way as Satan is the father of lies, the opponent of God the Father, the Antichrist is the opponent of Christ and the False Prophet, the spirit of lies is against the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, so the prostitute Babylon is the rival of the bride of Christ, the true church.

30 We tend to the following interpretation:

- The beast and its kingdom represent the political world of the end-time: see Rev 13 and 16:10.
- The prostitute Babylon, respectively the great city, represents either a whole worldwide religious system of apostasy, or a mankind that is hostile to the church of Jesus in general: see Rev 17–18.

Commentators who believe the Scriptures suggest basically three different identification possibilities when they speak of the prostitute Babylon:

1. **The Roman Catholic Church (Rome, the Vatican):** Already the Reformers thought of this possibility. In fact there are interesting parallels:<sup>56</sup> The woman sits on seven hills. Rome is built on seven hills. On old medallions Rome was portrayed as a woman sitting on seven hills. The prostitute is carried by the beast (17:3). Since Emperor Constantine the Church of Rome became more and more a state-church. The colours of the garment of the prostitute (17:4) are the same as those of the leaders of the roman church. The prostitute presides over many nations and languages (17:15). The word *catholic* means, as we know, *universal*. The prostitute is rich (17:4; 18:11-17), which also applies to the Vatican. The woman is drunk from the blood of the witnesses of Jesus (17:6; 18:20,24; 19:2). From the beginning and up to this day the Vatican

<sup>56</sup> Compare René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*. Translated from French. Original title : *Le Retour de Jésus-Christ* (Chicago : Moody Press, 1955), pp. 225ff.

has persecuted faithful servants of the Lord who dared to denounce evils in the Church of Rome, and even had them burned on the stake. Representing the millions (!!) of victims of Rome we name the Huguenots, Jan Hus and Savonarola. But it should be added that the advocates of this hypothesis of interpretation would certainly not accuse Catholics in general but rather the leading clergy in the Vatican, the papacy. That was for instance the case of the Reformers.

2. **Islam:** Recently Islam has experienced a kind of re-birth and is on the march. The rich revenues from oil in many Islamic countries have certainly contributed to a new offensive of Islam. When Ayatollah Khomeini some decades ago took power in Iran giving the Muslims a new sense of strength some evangelicals speculated with the possibility that Islam could be the prostitute of Babylon. To be honest, we are less convinced of this hypothesis though it is thinkable that Islam will belong in the end-time to a syncretistic super church of a unified religion. This leads us to the third hypothesis:

3. **A unified world religion:** How often is it said, that this world will see no peace as long as there are different religions. So the voices which demand a unified world religion are getting louder. The demand is for more emphasis on the common elements of different religions downplaying the differences. On the basis of such common ground one could form a new, syncretistic universal church. Bahaism constitutes a kind of prototype of such a universal church. It is quite possible that we will see a “mega-church” of this format at the end of time. **Actualisation:** We ask: Has not the ecumenical council of churches (ECC: with its main centre in Geneva) been going in this direction for a long time? It is true that the members of this organisation are also members of different denominations and confessions. But for some years now the ECC has distanced itself from the *CREDO*, that Jesus is the only way to eternal salvation.<sup>57</sup> In the ECC the point has now been reached, where mission (winning converts through evangelisation) is regarded as “sin”.

The Christian faith is no longer seen as the only true religion. The intention to convert adherents of another religion is seen increasingly as intolerance and arrogance. The new slogan of the ECC is “inter-religious dialogue”. We are from this point on not allowed to win adherents of other religions to our point of view, because according to their concept, Christ is also present in other religions. The ECC does not speak anymore of *the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ only...*, no, social, economic and political problems are more important. One actually has to lament because of an increasing neo-Marxist tendency. The new goal is the socio-political liberation of the whole world and a multi-cultural and pluralistic society. Therefore one should not be surprised of increasing compromises in questions of doctrine. Delegates of other religions are regular participants of the ECC meetings, either as observers or partners of discussion. The way of dialog is supposed to lead to unity. It has to be said that the Church of Rome is to this day not an official member of the ECC; it takes part in its meetings as an observer only. This may surprise many. The reason for this seems obvious in our opinion: The Roman Catholic Church will not become an official member of the ECC because its ultimate goal can only be that all other churches should return to its fold (to the *una sancta*) to become finally the only and true catholic (universal) church. One should not be surprised then, that the Vatican in recent years has outwardly been very open to dialogue with other Christian confessions (and denominations) as well as other religions. Even Evangelicals are accepted, no problem... of course only under the condition that the pope be accepted as head. Catholic priests who celebrate mass in Buddhist or Hindu vestments are no novelty. For several years there has been discussion in liberal circles of the Anglican Church and with many Lutherans on a reunification with the Church of Rome. In many Christian circles they speak of

<sup>57</sup> Biblical statements like those of Joh 14:6 and Act 4:12 have long since been discarded by the ECC. The Bible is no longer the only binding authority.

unity in diversity (*l'unité dans la diversité*). In fact and in truth the aim is a unity that can only be reached at the expense of truth. Could the prostitute Babylon be an ecumenism of the end-time, a universal religion characterised by a total syncretism? And, who knows, will the pope be its “chief-shepherd”? The future will show. However the disciples of Jesus are challenged to be watchful: see Mat 24:4-5.24; 1Th 5:6; 1Pe 4:7; 5:8; Rev 22:18-19.

The following is said about the prostitute Babylon:

- She will exploit the nations: Vv 1.3; “*she sits on many waters*”: these are nations (compare V. 15 and especially the economics in 18:3.11-19).
- She is accused to have left truth and purity: V. 2. This may be an allusion to her heretical doctrine and immorality (18:23; 19:2).
- John was carried by the Spirit into the desert and then saw the woman on the beast (V. 3): Some commentators interpret in this way, that every place which is left by God turns into a desert (Alexander) or that it is a place where the thirsty find no drink (Unger; see Joh 7:37-39).
- The prostitute is carried by the beast, i.e. by the Roman Empire of the end-time and its leader, the Antichrist: V. 4. In verse 16 it says that the beast and its allies will later get rid of the prostitute through annihilation.
- She is materially rich: V. 4; see 18:11ff.
- She is characterised by immorality (17:2.4-5; see 18:3-5.9; 19:2) and doctrines of magic (18:2.23). Therefore she is called in verse 1 “*the great prostitute*”. Compare the parallel Jer 51:6-8, announcing the judgement of the city of Babylon. We are reminded that magical practices were already spread from the ancient city of Babylon. Here Babylon stands for a worldwide godless system, in which true believers are not tolerated.
- The greatest sin of the prostitute Babylon is that she persecutes the witnesses of Jesus. It seems that the “Super-Church” of the end-times will agree with the Antichrist to persecute all the true believers (17:6; 18:6.20.24; 19:2).

Some additional remarks to verses 1-6: The prostitute Babylon is to be seen as the counterpart of the church of Jesus. The heavenly Jerusalem represents at the same time the glorified people of God (see 21:9ff). The prostitute Babylon respectively the city of Babylon, which falls (chapter 18) stands for the worldly, godless and antichristian system. As in the Old Testament Israel was called the wife of Yahweh, so in the New Testament the church is called the bride of Christ. See also Rev 21:2.9-27, where the heavenly Jerusalem is called the bride of Christ. Alexander says:

Before the true church of Jesus Christ, called the wife of the Lamb, is revealed to John he sees also a prostitute, who is the satanic imitation of the bride and the incarnation of a false religion which deifies/idolises man.<sup>58</sup>

In relation to the unfaithful Jerusalem, compare with the passage Isa 1:21.

**V. 5:** “*This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH*”: This false super-church is here called a *mystery*, in the same way as Paul calls the church of Jesus a mystery (see Eph 3:3-6). Paul calls the incarnation (God becoming man) a mystery (1Ti 3:16), so also the godless works of the Antichrist (2Th 2:7). It could be that the mystery of godlessness of the Antichrist (perhaps not least active through the prostitute Babylon, the false church) will only then develop fully when the other mystery, namely the church, will have left the stage of this world. The passage in 2Th 2:6-8<sup>59</sup> is interpreted by Pretribulationists in this way.

<sup>58</sup> Compare John H. Alexander, op. cit., p. 303 (translated from French).

<sup>59</sup> Compare our thesis: *2 Thessaloniens 2:1-12: Commentaire exégétique et théologique*, Mémoire présenté en vue d'obtenir le grade de Maître en théologie à la Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique de Vaux-sur-Seine, mars 1990.

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In Holy Scripture other cities are also accused of prostitution: see Tyre in Isa 23:15-16; Nineveh in Nah 3:4 and Jerusalem in Eze 16:1ff. Babylon as mother of all prostitutes constitutes so to speak the culmination or stands representative for the worldwide system, which could be called a false super-church (compare Babylon at the time of Jeremiah: Jer 51:6-8).

## 10 (2) The mystery of the prostitute Babylon revealed: Chapter 17:7-14

**V. 7:** It has already been mentioned: as the church of Jesus is a mystery (Eph 3:3-6), so also the false church Babylon. It is a mystery which is hidden to unbelievers and the godless, so that the true nature of the deceiving and false system is not discerned by them.

15 **Vv 8-11:** This is an utterly enigmatic passage, but we think that in the light of parallel passages like Dan 2 (the statue), Dan 7 (the four animals), 2Th 2 and Rev 13, interpretation is possible or can at least be attempted:

20 **V. 8:** “*The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction...*”: As we have already said to chapter 13, we believe with many other exegetes, that the beast represents Rome. “*The beast, which you saw*” would then be an allusion to the Roman Empire at the time of the apostle. The beast “*once was*” (Greek imperfect: ἦν) could be a prophetic preview of the fall of Rome in 476 AD. It is said that it will again “*come up out of the abyss*”; this points to the fact that it will reappear or rise again one day (V. 8b). One speaks of a  
25 revitalised Rome (*Roma Renata*). The following parallels and indices speak for this interpretation:

- In Dan 2:40-43: the fourth phase of the statue (iron), which stands parallel to the fourth animal in Dan 7 (with 10 horns and iron teeth) is divided into two parts: (1) the two legs of iron: these would correspond with *that which was* in Rev 17:8, (2) the feet mixed of iron and clay: these  
30 correspond with: *will come up out of the abyss*; i.e. the revitalised Roman Empire at the end of time.
- Dan 7:25 shows that the power of the 10 horns is related to the end-time (*a time, times and half a time*). As already pointed out, the period of *1 time, times and ½ time* corresponds with the 1260 days respectively 42 months during which time, according to Rev 11:2-3; 12:6 and 13:4ff, the beast will reign with the help of the dragon. These passages are to be related to the end-  
35 times, what is clearly confirmed through the parallel in Dan 12:7.11.
- The connection with Jesus’ words concerning the end-time in Mat 24 show that the *abomination that causes desolation* will find its final fulfilment through the acts of the Antichrist: compare Mat 24:15 with Dan 9:27; 12:7.11; 7:25 as well as Rev 11:2-3; 13:5.
- 40 • The miracle of the healing of one of the seven heads of the beast with the 10 horns in Rev 13:3 refers probably to the same event as Rev 17:8, i.e. the beast rising again and being rejuvenated.

**V. 9:** “*The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits, they are also 7 kings*”: These words have often been applied to Rome which is built on seven hills. Some commentators see here  
45 an allusion to the Church of Rome with its pontiff, the pope. Because in verse 9 it says that the heads are at the same time kings, this interpretation seems questionable. We refer to the following verse 10:

**V. 10:** Next to the interpretation mentioned, where the 7 hills represent the city of Rome and the  
50 prostitute Babylon refers to the Vatican, we hear of three further suggestions of interpretation:

1. Seven different modes of ruling within the Roman Empire: (1) the kings from the house of Tarquinia (753-510 BC), (2) the consuls (510-494 BC), (3) the plebeians/dictators (494-390 BC), (4) the republicans or decemvires, i.e. the oligarchy of the ten (390-60 BC), (5) the

- 5 triumvirate, i.e. the rule of three men (60-27 BC), (6) Imperialism, i.e. rule by the emperors (27 BC - 476 AD), (7) the Antichrist at the end of time. The 6<sup>th</sup> form was that at the time of the apostle John. The 7<sup>th</sup> form, i.e. the 7<sup>th</sup> head would then relate to the Antichrist.
- 10 2. The 7 heads represent 7 Roman emperors. Within this hypothesis there are again several suggestions: (a) 1<sup>st</sup> Julius Caesar 2<sup>nd</sup> Tiberius 3<sup>rd</sup> Caligula 4<sup>th</sup> Claudius 5<sup>th</sup> Nero 6<sup>th</sup> Domitian and 7<sup>th</sup> the Antichrist (so to speak as “revived” Nero or Domitian). (b) 1<sup>st</sup> Augustus 2<sup>nd</sup> Tiberius 3<sup>rd</sup> Caligula 4<sup>th</sup> Claudius 5<sup>th</sup> Nero 6<sup>th</sup> Domitian 7<sup>th</sup> the Antichrist. Contrary to this suggestion the following can be stated: After Domitian the Roman Empire had several other heathen emperors until the first Christian-minded emperor (i.e. Constantine at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century)
- 15 came into power. Between Constantine and the fall of the Roman Empire there were again several more heathen emperors. What is more, the suggested list of emperors is incomplete. It lists only the worst (anti-Christian and anti-Jewish) emperors. Bonnet who also favours this interpretation suggests: 1<sup>st</sup> Augustus 2<sup>nd</sup> Tiberius 3<sup>rd</sup> Caligula 4<sup>th</sup> Claudius 5<sup>th</sup> Nero 6<sup>th</sup> Vespasian 7<sup>th</sup> Titus and 8<sup>th</sup> (see v. 11) Domitian. Consequently he needs to put into the words
- 20 of the apostle an error, because he believed that Domitian was the last Roman emperor and that he will be destroyed by the returning Christ.<sup>60</sup> Concerning this the following needs to be remarked: Before accusing a biblical writer of an error, one should rather ask whether there is an alternative way of explanation. This is generally accepted for all exposition of the Bible. With other commentators we believe that there is an alternative possibility of understanding,
- 25 without contradiction and incoherence:
3. The 7 heads/mountains represent 7 kings or kingdoms which were in the course of history enemies of Israel. They were: 1. Egypt 2. Assyria 3. Babylon 4. Medo-Persia 5. Greece 6. Rome, which was and is no more 7. Rome at the end of time. We tend to this interpretation.
- 30 Contrary to this way of seeing things may be argued that Dan 7 speaks only of 4 animals or kingdoms and not of seven.<sup>61</sup> While this is true it is not a conclusive argument against this interpretation: 1. In Dan 2 the fourth part of the statue (legs of iron) is clearly divided into two. This can be seen, as mentioned above, as corresponding with Rev 13:1-3 and 17:8-11. 2. In Dan 8 two animals oppose each other (the ram = Medo-Persia and the he-goat = Greece) 3. The
- 35 visions of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2: the statue) and Daniel (Dan 7: the four animals) refer explicitly to the time of Nebuchadnezzar (i.e. after the neo-Babylonian Empire; see Dan 2:38-39). This point of time from which the time is calculated (the so-called *terminus a quo*) does not apply necessarily to the Revelation of John. The perspective of John reaches even from the beginning of history (see for instance 12:1-4) to the end-time (12:9-17), and even to the new
- 40 creation (21:1ff). Israel became a nation in Egypt and its history began with Egypt; later it was suppressed by the Assyrian Empire (which also overpowered Egypt), until Assyria was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

45 With this interpretation the Roman Empire at the time of the apostle John would correspond with the 6<sup>th</sup> king or kingdom. There should be a time when it is no more and then to appear suddenly and to assume power over the world. This beast has 10 horns (see Dan 7:7.20.24; Rev 13:1; 17:7-16). The horns represent kings (Dan 7:24; Rev 17:12).

50 **V. 11:** “*And the beast that was and is not, he also is an eighth, and is of the seven...*”: With Alexander and other commentators we presume that this is to be understood as follows: The 7<sup>th</sup> refers to the newly resurrected Roman Empire, the 8<sup>th</sup> to its leader, the Antichrist. Possibly there is also a connection to Dan 7, where it says in verses 8.20.24 that after the 10 horns, another small (an eleventh) horn (which destroyed 3 of the 10 horns) grew. Meaning that there are only 7 left and itself would be the 8<sup>th</sup>. In Rev 17:13 it says that the other horns will give their power to the beast.

<sup>60</sup> See Louis Bonnet, op. cit., pp. 424-425.

<sup>61</sup> So for instance Louis Bonnet, op. cit., p. 423.



- 5 This horn represents the last beast and is at the same time called *the beast* in Revelation. The little horn is in relation to the heads the 7<sup>th</sup>, in relation to the horns – if you want to say it like that – the 11<sup>th</sup> minus 3 destroyed ones = the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Vv 12-13: “...one hour...”: see Luk 22:53.

10

V. 14: “...his called, chosen, and faithful followers”: Alexander<sup>62</sup> considers the possibility that the *called* represent the believers of the old covenant, the *chosen* the church and the *faithful* the believers of the great tribulation. We want to leave this issue open as it could also be an enumeration of synonyms. In the last analysis the redeemed of all times are *called, chosen and faithful*.<sup>63</sup>

15

### (3) The fall of Babylon: Chapter 17:15-18

V. 15: As already mentioned above to verses 1-6, the prostitute Babylon, the religious system of the end-time, will have great influence upon all nations.

- 20 Vv 16-17: After he has co-operated with her, the beast, the Antichrist with his allies (10 kings) will destroy the prostitute Babylon. In verse 17 it says that God will put it in their heart (i.e. the idea and the plan) to destroy the prostitute Babylon. It does not say here explicitly what motives will cause the Antichrist to act like this, unless verse 16 is an indication: the riches of the prostitute Babylon, the “super-church”?! Her riches are described in 18:11-19. This sequence can often be observed:
- 25 Bandits at first cooperate together to get rich. Because one or the other (or both) then want to have the spoil for themselves alone, they eliminate the other one. The Antichrist profits from the prostitute Babylon for a certain time. He carries her (17:3.7). Some commentators suspect that the prostitute Babylon even helps the beast to gain power. Once his position of power is secured, he will destroy the prostitute. The reason behind this, we assume, will be that the beast will not tolerate religion any longer; rather he will demand man to worship him as god (see Rev 13:8.15; 2Th 2:4).<sup>64</sup>
- 30

- V. 18: This verse could speak for this interpretation: The prostitute will have power over all nations, but the day will come when the Antichrist will demand all power for himself. Chapter 18 then is only a detailed description of the prostitute and her fall, which has already been announced in 17:16-18.
- 35

### (4) Description of the prostitute Babylon and her fall: Chapter 18

(a) The angel who proclaims the fall of the prostitute Babylon: Vv 1-3

- V. 2: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!”: See also 14:8 as well as Isa 21:9 and compare with passages in Isa 13:19-22; 34:11-14; Jer 50:39.
- 40

(b) Command to the saints, to leave Babylon: Vv 4-8

V. 4: “Another voice...”: Is this the voice of Christ? Compare Rev 18:4; 14:13. “Come out of her my people...”: This means to depart from the prostitute Babylon. Compare this with the exhortation of the apostle Paul in 2Co 6:14-17! Nowadays one could ask the question whether it is right to

<sup>62</sup> John H. Alexander, op. cit., pp. 313-314.

<sup>63</sup> The third expression can have the meaning of *faithful ones* or *believers*.

<sup>64</sup> Compare with the statue in Dan 3 and Daniel in the den of lions in Dan 6:9ff: Daniel and his friends refused to bow down before anyone except the true God.

5 work within the fellowship of a church which collaborates with the ecumenical movement, which a long time ago has repudiated the pure biblical doctrine respectively the *sola scriptura* (the [Holy] Scripture alone).

10 **Vv 6-7:** Compare this call for revenge with O. T. passages like Psa 137:8; Isa 40:2 and Jer 50:29. The question is to whom this call for revenge upon the prostitute Babylon is addressed: to the Church of Jesus? This would stand in contradiction to the words of Jesus (for instance Mat 5:38-48) and to those of the apostles (Paul in Rom 12:19-21). Bonnet for instance believes therefore that this call goes to the executors of the divine judgement, namely the beast and its allies (see Rev 17:16-17). We doubt this, because verse 6 speaks of revenge which applies to those persecuted by  
15 the prostitute and hardly to the beast and its allies. Or are these words addressed to the believers of the great tribulation, to the martyrs (compare above to Rev 6:9-11)? If so, could this be seen as one more indication that the age of the church is not (not any more) meant, but the age after that?

(c) *Lament on earth and joy in heaven because of her fall: Vv 9-20*

20 **Vv 9-11:** Kings and merchants will mourn the fall of Babylon, because through her they have gained riches.

**Vv 12-19:** Here the riches of Babylon are described (for the fall of the city compare Isa 13:21; Jer 50-51 as well as the parallel to Tyrus in Isa 23 and Eze 26-27).

25 **V. 20:** Here too the proverb applies: "*The sorrow of the one* (the unbelievers: Vv 9-11.15-16.19) *is the joy of the other* (the saints: V. 20; 19:1-2)."

Observe:      3 x "*in one hour*":      Vv 10.17.19.  
                  3 x "*woe, woe*":          Vv 10.16.19.

30 (d) *The total destruction of Babylon is announced and justified: Vv 21-24*

**V. 21:** The destruction of Babylon is announced with a symbolic act, the throwing of a millstone into the sea (compare Jer 51:63-64). This means that Babylon will forever remain at the bottom of the sea, i.e. no more to rise again.

35 **V. 22:** No music will be heard anymore etc. Compare with Isa 24:7-9.

**Vv 23-24:** Compare with Na 3:4. These verses give us a further insight into the essence and character of the prostitute Babylon: a false church, whose religion is nothing but witchcraft and magic (V. 23). Most horrible is that it has persecuted the true believers. The reformers, and others  
40 after them, have interpreted this as the Church of Rome (the papacy) as it has persecuted true believers in all times even if not everywhere in the same way. Ultimately, all religions persecute Christians.

## i.) The return of Christ: Chapter 19

### (1) The wedding supper of the Lamb: Vv 1-10

45 (a) *Praise in heaven because of the fall of Babylon: Vv 1-6*

5 In heaven first we hear the praise over the fall of Babylon, the great prostitute, the false church and more over the fact that the Almighty reigns (V. 6). Then (after V. 7) our attention is drawn towards the true church, the church of Jesus, the bride of the Lamb.

10 One should notice the contrast: the prostitute Babylon is condemned (Vv 1-6) – the bride of the Lamb celebrates the wedding supper with her bridegroom (Vv 7-9). The picture of Christ and the church as his bride compare with passages like Eph 5:23ff. See also Rev 21:9ff, where the bride, the wife of the Lamb is described as the Jerusalem coming down from heaven. In Rev 22:17 the Spirit<sup>65</sup> and the bride call to the Lord (the bridegroom): "*Come...!*"

15 **V. 2:** God does not judge unjustly; his judgements are righteous. Anyone who refuses his love and truth (see 2Th 2:10-12), hardens his heart and does not repent (see Rev 9:20.21; 16:9.11) that person's condemnation is all the more justified. Judgement is an integral part of God's righteousness. He is even called righteous because he judges the unjust (see Rev 16:5-7; and also Isa 26:20-21; 2Th 1:5-10). Let it be said again – to speak with the idiom of Revelation – anyone  
20 who does not accept Jesus, the slain Lamb (Rev 5:6, i.e. as the crucified one), as substituting Redeemer, will meet him as Lion (Rev 5:5), as judge and perish in his own sin.

25 In verses 2-6 the word "*Hallelujah*" (in Greek: Ἀλληλουῖά) appears four times and nowhere else in the New Testament. *Hallelujah* is written with Greek letters and in the imperative (plural) of the Hebrew verb הלל (= *halal*; in the so-called Piel-root [= *hillel*] it means *to praise*. Imperative 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural = *hallelu*) and the short form of Yahweh = Yah (Hebrew: יה). The expression then means: "*Praise Yah[weh].*"

30 *Hallelujah* (הלל־יה) occurs in the Old Testament especially in the Psalms 146–150; they all begin with the word *Hallelujah*.

(b) *The wedding supper of the Lamb: Vv 7-9*

35 Israel was seen in the Old Testament as the bride of Yahweh (Isa 62:4-5). The church is being prepared by the Father as a bride (Eph 5:23ff) for his Son (see Col 1:12; Mat 22:2). The son has bought her through his own blood (Eph 5:25; see Eph 1:7; 1Pe 1:18-19 and Rev 19:13). The bride's garment of white linen (19:14) symbolises the purity of the bride. This purity is of course only received by the grace of the Lord (see Eph. 2:8-10) and through faith (see Rom 3:21-23; Gal 2:16) in the one who has given himself as a substitute (2Co 5:21; Isa 53:9-12). The church believes in him, even those who (like us) have not yet seen him (1Pe 1:8). We are longing for him and his coming (Rev 22:17.20). When he comes to receive us to himself at the rapture, whether it is  
40 through resurrection (of those believers who have died already) or by being changed (those believers who are alive at this time: see 1Th 4:14-17; 1Co 15:51-53), then we will be with him forever. The celebration of the wedding supper will be preceded by the evaluation of the believers, i.e. all believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ (their Lord), to be judged (2Co 5:10), according to the works they have done as believers (see 1Co 3:11-15).

45 Verse 9 is one of the so-called *beatitudes* in the book of Revelation. Here the goal of the believers will have been reached, the union with their Lord, as a bride with her bridegroom on the wedding day.<sup>66</sup>

(c) *John's reaction: V. 10*

<sup>65</sup> The Spirit of God lives in his church: see Eph 2:20-22; compare with 1Co 3:16; 6:19-20.

<sup>66</sup> Compare with the possibility of a typological interpretation of the Song of Songs: the bridegroom and the Shulammitte.

- 5 In the face of what he heard and probably also saw (see 22:8), John fell to the ground to worship the one who spoke to him. But since this person was “only” an angel he declines worship from John (see the same in 22:8-9).

10 An angel of the Lord does not accept worship. One exception is ‘the’ *Angel of the Lord* in the Old Testament who is identical with the pre-existent Christ, i.e. with the Son of God before becoming man (*ante incarnationem*). He could receive the worship of man (see for instance Exo 3:2-6; Jos 5:13-15). Otherwise only fallen angels, i.e. Satan and his angels, want to be worshiped by man. We know that Satan wanted to be worshiped even by the Son of Man, i.e. by Jesus, the Son of God (see Mat 4:9; Luk 4:7).

## 15 **(2) Christ shall return to this earth: Vv 11-21**

### (a) *The appearance of Christ: Vv 11-16*

The event described here, is the fulfilment of the announcement of the two angels in Act 1:11-12.

20 **V. 11:** In 6:2 the *white rider* is, as mentioned, to be identified with the *Antichrist*. But here, in 19:11, the rider on the white horse is the true Christ. His attributes are *faithful* and *true*, see also in 3:14, the letter to the unfaithful church Laodicea (the faithful Lord in contrast to the unfaithful church).

25 **V. 12:** “*His eyes are like blazing fire*”: see 2:18 (Thyatira). This symbolises his omniscience; his eyes (compare the 7 eyes of the Lamb in 5:6) penetrate everything. Compare the omnipresence and omniscience of the Lord in Psalm 139. “*And on his head, there are many crowns* (in Greek actually *diadems*)”: The crowns symbolise authority and power. For omnipotence and omnipresence of Christ compare the well-known words of Jesus in Mat 28:18.20.

30 **V. 13:** “*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood*”: This is probably an allusion to his work of redemption on the cross: see Col 1:20; Heb 2:14ff. There are also commentators who interpret this to refer to the blood of the enemies of Christ, which has been shed in judgement at the battle of Armageddon (compare also Isa 63:1-4 and Rev 14:20). “*And his name is the Word of God*”: This designation (ὁ λόγος = *the word*) for Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, the creator of all things is used by John also in the prologue to his gospel (see Joh 1:1.2.14). This of course can be seen as an additional indication that the gospel of John and the book of Revelation were written by the same author: namely the apostle John. Christ is, so to speak, the personified and incarnate Word of God.

40 **V. 14:** “*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses*”: They were clothed in *fine linen, white and clean*: Jesus comes with his angels, see Mat 16:27 and 25:31; but he also comes with the glorified believers who just had held the wedding supper with him (Rev 19:7-9; see 1Th 4:17; 2Th 1:7-9; 1Co 6:2-3; Zec 14:4-6<sup>67</sup> and especially 1Th 3:13). The fact that it says in verse 14, that they are clothed in *fine linen white and clean* would rather point to the view that these are believers who have been cleansed and justified by their Lord (see Rev 19:8).

45 **Vv 15-16:** “*And out of his mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword, that with it he might smite the nations*”: Compare this with 1:15; 2:12 and 19:21. He is the judge: Mat 25:31-32; Joh 5:27-29. He will battle against the nations: see Zec 14:2-4. “*He will rule them with an iron sceptre*”: This is a quotation from Psa 2:9.

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<sup>67</sup> In the Old Testament *saints* may refer to believers as well as to angels.

5 This dominion comes again into the picture in Rev 20:4-6. The glorified believers shall rule with their Lord during the 1000 years. Compare this with the promise to the church of Thyatira in Rev 2:26-27. See more to this below in chapter 20. "*He treads the winepress...*": see Rev 14:20: the harvest of grapes indicates that the time of judgement has come, i.e. mankind is – like the grapes at the time of harvest – ripe for judgement. "*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*": compare these titles with the passages Rev 1:5; 11:15-19; Luk 1:32-33 and Act 17:31.

(b) Christ defeats the enemies: Vv 17-21

This passage speaks – as mentioned (to 16:16) above – of the battle called *Armageddon*. We believe that the following passages refer to this event: next to the already mentioned passage in the New Testament (Rev 16:12-16) we look at references in the Old Testament: Joe 3:9-15 (4:9-15); Dan 11:41-45; Zec 14:4-13 and possibly also Eze 39:4.17-20 (verses 17-18 in Revelation connect with this passage in Ezekiel).

(i) Christ judges the nations: Vv 17-18.21

Jesus announces the judgement of the nations (see Mat 25:31ff). Verse 21 could give the impression that all men will perish at this event, i.e. that there would be no survivors. Who would then be left for the 1000-year kingdom, the millennium spoken of in 20:4-6? 20:3 suggests that not the whole of mankind is destroyed in this war, but rather the majority. Otherwise it would be useless to bind Satan for 1000 years, so that he cannot tempt the nations (i.e. mankind) anymore. In Isa 24:6 it says that after this judgment time only "few people" will be left.

(ii) Christ judges the Antichrist and the False Prophet: Vv 19-20

25 They are thrown *alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur*: In 20:10 it says that Satan will follow them to this place after the 1000-year kingdom. Compare this with the passages 14:10-11; 20:14-15 and 21:8, which state that people who follow Satan and the beast (Antichrist) will be banished with Satan and his allies to the same place for all eternity.

30 At this juncture we want to refer back to the questions already raised in chapters 13 and 17: The Antichrist and the False Prophet, who are they and where do they come from? We have already mentioned the (speculative!) hypothesis that the Antichrist is possibly no ordinary human being; it says in Rev 11:7 and 17:8 that he will rise (again) out of the abyss. The following question is not a theological statement but only a conjecture of thought: Could it be possible that God allows Satan to imitate even the incarnation of the Son of God? Satan, in copying the ways of God would then cause one of his demons (angels that have fallen with him) to appear in human form, even as the Son of God did himself. We admit that the thought that Satan could even imitate the incarnation may be farfetched. On the other hand, we ask whether the fact that the Antichrist and the False Prophet, in contrast to man, are already thrown into the fiery lake before the 1000-year kingdom, is not an indication that the two are (shall be) not ordinary human beings. Unbelievers, according to Rev 20:11-15, will appear before the divine white throne after the 1000-year kingdom to be condemned (according to their works) and thrown into the lake of fire. This is just a thought and we do realise that the Antichrist in 2Th 2:3ff is called "*the man of lawlessness*" and the man doomed to destruction and that the number 666 is the number of a man (Rev 13:18: and not that of an angel). One may also think of demons appearing as men (cf. Heb 13:1)!?

### 3. The millennium and the last judgement: Chapter 20

#### a.) The millennium: Vv 1-6

##### (1) Satan bound for a 1000 years: Vv 1-3

Satan is defeated. In the eyes of God he is already condemned. Holy Scripture speaks of the following stages of his judgement:

1. His first judgement took place at his own fall when he was expelled from the presence of God and thrown on the earth. We refer to the already mentioned passages Isa 14:9-14 and Eze 28:11-19 as well as Gen 3:1ff and Rev 12:3-4.
2. His second condemnation took place through the death and resurrection of Jesus: see Joh 12:31; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1Jo 3:8; Rev 1:18.
3. Of a third judgement we read in Rev 12:9-10: To this day Satan has still access to God to accuse the believers (see Job 1-2; Zec 3:1-2; Rev 12:10-11). The context of Rev 12 would suggest that probably in the middle of the great tribulation, i.e. before the 42 months period of the Antichrist, Satan will be finally thrown out of heaven by Michael (Rev 12:7-9). Knowing that he has not much time left Satan will vent his rage on earth/mankind (Rev 12:12), persecuting Israel (Rev 12:13.16: the *woman*, or the *wife*) and the Christians (Rev 12:17; 13:5-7). Certainly he will do this through his Antichrist to whom he will give power (Rev 13:4; 2Th 2:9).
4. A fourth stage of his judgement will be his imprisonment/binding for 1000 years at the return of Christ: see Rev 20:1-3 (compare Isa 24:21-22).
5. His final judgement and condemnation will take place after the 1000-year kingdom of Christ. Being set free after the 1000 years he will try again to tempt and deceive the people living at that time to rebel against Christ and his own, but he will not succeed. Rather he will be finally thrown into the lake of fire where the Antichrist and the False Prophet have preceded him. Only at this point will Satan be thrown into hell which God has prepared for him and his angels (see Mat 25:41). Men who have followed Satan and the Antichrist into their rebellion against God will fall at the end of time under the same verdict, i.e. to be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14-15). See more to this theme below.

**V. 1a:** Who is this angel coming down from heaven to bind Satan for 1000 years? He must be very powerful, because:

- He seizes the dragon: V. 2a.
- He binds him for 1000 years: V. 2b.
- He throws him into the abyss: V. 3a.
- He locks the abyss: V. 3b.
- He seals the abyss: V. 3c.
- He releases Satan at the end of the 1000 years: Vv 3d.7.

Could this angel be the archangel Michael? Rev 12:7-9 could speak for it (despite Jud 9). But many commentators think that only Christ himself has the authority and power to defeat Satan and to throw him into hell, because he is the one who holds the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:18; see Col 2:14-15; Heb 2:14; 1Jo 3:8).

5 **Vv 1b-2:** “...a great chain”: Compare with 2Pe 2:4 and especially Jude 6, where it is said that the fallen angels are kept in darkness with everlasting chains until the day of judgement. Probably one must not have to think of literal chains since angels are spirits and can hardly be bound with material bonds. *Chains* stand symbolically for bondage or imprisonment. This is not to suggest that the serpent is also only a symbol for evil. Many liberal theologians deny the existence of Satan, as they deny the existence of angels in general.<sup>68</sup> If one should claim that the serpent only symbolises evil as such and that Satan is not an existing being, why then should one not also say that the Lamb is not Jesus, the Son of God, but only symbolising the good as such (*Jesus, the Lamb of God* see Joh 1:29)? Since the temptation and fall of the first human (Gen 3:1ff), the seducer, Satan, is among other terms described as *serpent*. See above Rev 12:7-9; compare also with the Leviathan, the gliding and coiling serpent in Isa 27:1.<sup>69</sup>

20 **V. 3:** “*Abyssos*” occurs 7 times in Revelation (9:1.2.11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1.3); it is the place where the demons are kept for judgement. Compare also Luk 8:31 and Rom 10:7. We do not know whether the abyss is a part (so to speak a *separate chamber*) in the kingdom of the dead (AT = *Sheol*, NT = *Hades*), where man is waiting for the day of resurrection or the day of judgement. Believers were freed from Hades after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (see Luk 23:43; possibly Eph 4:8; 1Pe 4:6). The abyss must not be confused with hell (so-called Gehenna<sup>70</sup>). One could call the abyss a temporary place of custody until the time of judgement, whereas Gehenna is the place of final condemnation. To avoid repetition we comment on the reason for binding Satan and on the 1000 years in verses 4-6.

## (2) The kingdom of a thousand years: Vv 4-6

30 The specification of the duration of 1000 years for the kingdom of Christ with his people occurs in Holy Scripture only in Rev 20 (6 times). Walvoord<sup>71</sup> says rightly that it is easy to understand the meaning if it is interpreted literally. But since many commentators reject the idea of a 1000-year kingdom of Christ after his return, we have numerous views to avoid such an earthly 1000-year kingdom. Basically one has to distinguish between the three following interpretations:<sup>72</sup>

### (a) The different systems of interpretation

#### (i) Postmillennialism

35 Supporters of this interpretation claim that Christ will return after (*post* from Latin = *after*) the 1000 years (millennium). Jesus would then not be present on this earth during the millennium. It is believed that through the proclamation of the gospel the kingdom of God will grow on this earth and so the world will grow successively better through the ethical new orientation provided by the gospel. So the golden age where peace will rule is expected. I honestly have to admit that in view of Bible passages like 2Th 2:3 and 2Ti 3:1-5 it is a mystery to me how one can defend such an interpretation. After this kingdom of peace, Christ will return and eternity will commence. The most well-known proponents of this exposition are Daniel Whitby<sup>73</sup> (1638-1725), Benjamin B.

<sup>68</sup> Nothing new under the sun: Already the Sadducees at the time of Jesus and the apostles denied not only the bodily resurrection but also the existence of angels (see Act 23:8).

<sup>69</sup> Compare with our dissertation *Restauratio und Resurrectio in der Jesaja-Apokalypse*, Dissertation, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Heverlee (Leuven), Belgium, 2001, pp. 196-202, 294-295.

<sup>70</sup> Greek: γέεννα, derived from Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom*, the valley *Hinnom* near Jerusalem, where carcasses, etc. were burned. *Gehenna* is the Jewish and New Testament term of what we call in English *hell* (compare with German *Hölle*).

<sup>71</sup> John Walvoord, op. cit., pp. 977-978.

<sup>72</sup> There are nuances within each of the three systems of interpretation.

<sup>73</sup> He is called the father of Postmillennialism.

5 Warfield and more recently Loraine Boettner.<sup>74</sup> Since the two world-wars (which showed impressively, what an illusion it is to believe in the positivism of man) this view is held by less theologians. The Holy Scripture does not support an increasing improvement of mankind but testifies rather to an increasing apostasy of man at the end of time.<sup>75</sup>

(ii) Amillennialism

10 Amillennialists claim that there is no 1000-year kingdom on earth. Therefore the designation A-Millennialism: The “A” is the so-called “Privative-Alpha”:<sup>76</sup> There is no millennium. The most prominent Amillennialist was no doubt the church father Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century). Well known (evangelical) supporters of Amillennialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are for example Oswald T. Allis, Louis Berkhof, G. C. Berkouwer, William Hendriksen and Leon Morris. Within Amillennialism  
15 there are three different views of the millennium:

1. The departed saints are already today ruling in heaven with their Lord.<sup>77</sup>
2. Augustine († 430 AD) interprets the millennium as the experience of the Christian at his re-  
birth. Christ already reigns today on earth through his church. The kingdom of Christ is of an  
20 exclusive spiritual nature. This Augustinian interpretation of the millennium was accepted by the Catholic Church so to speak *en bloc*.
3. The 1000 years are a reference to eternity.

(iii) Premillennialism

Advocates of Premillennialism (*prae* from Latin = *before*) claim that Christ will return before  
25 (*prae*) the millennium, i.e. his second coming, his glorious Epiphany will introduce his earthly 1000-year kingdom. In other words: while Postmillennialists place the so-called *golden age* (or the *messianic age*) before the return of Christ, Premillennialists expect its beginning only at the return of Christ. This interpretation was held by the majority of the early church fathers. Among them are: Papias, Justus the Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon and Tertullian. Here are some well-known followers of  
30 Premillennialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century: H. Alford, F. Godet and G. E. Ladd,<sup>78</sup> also R. Pache, J. F. Walvoord and C. Ryrie.<sup>79</sup>

(a) A consequent exegesis of the text of Revelation 20 speaks for Premillennialism

According to Rev 20:4-6 the resurrection of the unrighteous (in 20:6.14 called the *second death*)  
will only take place 1000 years after that of the righteous (in 20:5 called *first resurrection*):  
35 compare the expression: “*did not come to life until*” (οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι) in verse 5. Between the two

<sup>74</sup> See the arguments of Loraine Boettner in 'Postmillennialism' in *The Meaning of the Millennium: four views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 117-141.

<sup>75</sup> Compare the fitting argument of the Amillennialist Louis Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 176, against the postmillennialist view of a continual improvement of the world through the spread of the gospel: “This whole idea, however, does not seem to fit in with what the Bible tells us respecting the great apostasy toward the end of time.”

<sup>76</sup> In Greek privation can be expressed by the prefix of “a” (for instance: *adikos* = *unjust*, *apistos* = *unfaithful*, *unbelieving* etc.). Compare in English and German: „un“ (e.g. *ungerecht*, *unvorsichtig*, *unbelievable* etc.).

<sup>77</sup> See e. g. Anthony A. Hoekema, 'Amillennialism' in *The Meaning of the Millennium: four views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 168-172. He prefers the expression “*realized millennialism*” (see pp. 155, 169).

<sup>78</sup> These three represent the so-called historic-classic Premillennialism, which assumes that the church has to go through the whole time of the great tribulation, the time of the Antichrist (therefore *Posttribulationism* = *rapture after the great tribulation*).

<sup>79</sup> These three are supporters of the so-called dispensationalist Premillennialism, which presupposes that the church will be raptured before the great tribulation. Dispensationalists insist in a special way on the difference between Israel and the church in their respective dispensations (times of salvation). For more on this theme, see our notes on Eschatology. It should be noted that within Amillennialism as well as Premillennialism there are different views in detailed questions.



5 resurrections the raised believers will reign with Christ for 1000 years (millennium). The expression *1000 years* occurs in Rev 20:2-7 altogether 6 times. During this period Satan is held in the abyss. The timeframe (the interval) is clearly expressed in the words *no more* and *until* in the sentence “*to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended*” (ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη) as well as the following expression “*after these things*” (μετὰ ταῦτα) in verse 3. The same is also said in verse 7 where it tells us that Satan will be released again “*when the thousand years are over*” (ὅταν τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη). With other expositors we believe that the described imprisonment of Satan is also referred to in Isa 24:21-22. There the kings of the earth and the powers of heaven are imprisoned for many days to be brought to trial. Here Satan is imprisoned, for a short time he becomes active again, to be then thrown finally into the lake of fire. As in Isa 24:21-22 where the kings of the earth will be punished after many days, so it says in Rev 20:5-6.13-15, that the *rest of the dead* (i.e. the unbelievers) are judged after the thousand years and then thrown into the fiery lake. The expression “*after many days*” of Isa 24:22 is now clearly defined in Rev 20 as *a thousand years*.<sup>80</sup> Let it be said in this place that many commentators who avoid (deny) an earthly kingdom of Christ, also see the need to explain the passage Isa 24:21-23 as a later insertion, or they interpret the words contrary to the context. The latter also becomes necessary for opponents of an earthly kingdom of Christ when they interpret Rev 20. Some<sup>81</sup> interpret the words “*they came to life*” (ἐζήσαν [ezēsan]) in Rev 20:4 not of a physical but of a spiritual resurrection, i.e. conversion and being born again. They quote passages like Eph 2:1-6 and Col 3:1, where Paul stated that we were dead in our transgressions and that God has raised us with Christ (*he has made us alive with Christ: συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ*) or *we have been raised with Christ* (συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ). The thousand-year kingdom is then interpreted either as the spiritual kingdom in the hearts<sup>82</sup> of (believing) people, or the ‘in between place’ of souls of departed believers in the presence of their Lord in heaven, who wait for the resurrection of the body while others still stand in the fight of faith on this earth.<sup>83</sup> The words of the apostle Paul in 1Co 4:9ff should suffice to reject the idea that the believer is reigning during his life in this earthly body. Against a shifting of the thousand-year kingdom into heaven there are the following arguments: (1) The context demands that the scene is taking place on earth, because in Rev 19:11-21 the return of Christ to this earth is described. He defeats the nations and throws the beast and the False Prophet into the lake of fire. Also in Rev 20:1-3 the movement is from heaven to earth. There it says that an angel coming from heaven takes the dragon, Satan and locks him into the abyss, so that **those on earth** will not be tempted anymore. (2) In Rev 5:10 John says explicitly that the redeemed will reign on earth.<sup>84</sup> This cannot be the new earth yet (see Rev 21:1ff) because in Rev 20:7ff it states that Satan will be let loose after the 1000 years and that he will go forth to win the nations on the earth and to gather them for the battle against Jerusalem. In the new earth there will be no temptation and war anymore; Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire before its creation (compare Rev 20:10-11 and 21:1). The view that the 1000 years will begin at the return of Christ, is also supported by the fact that the Antichrist

<sup>80</sup> Compare August Dächsel, *Das Alte Testament: mit in den Text eingeschalteter Auslegung, ausführlichen Inhaltsangaben und erläuternden Bemerkungen*. In *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments*, ed. by August Dächsel (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf., n. d.), 4: 81, where to Isa 24:22 it is remarked in brackets: “What the New Testament seer John sees in Rev 20 and 21 in detail, the Old Testament prophet sees as a whole.” We translated from German into English.

<sup>81</sup> Compare for instance W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event: A Discussion of Scripture Teaching on the Second Advent and Questions related thereto*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Belfast: The Evangelical Book Shop, 1946), p. 91.

<sup>82</sup> So for instance the Postmillennialist Loraine Boettner, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>83</sup> Compare the amillennialist interpretation of Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), p. 237: “For the 1,000 years the souls of the martyrs reign with Christ in bliss, but the final state awaits the general resurrection.” Compare also with the Amillennialist Anthony A. Hoekema, op. cit., pp. 170-171, who interprets this reign of believing souls in heaven as the first and the physical resurrection as the second resurrection.

<sup>84</sup> It is not surprising that W. J. Grier does not touch this passage in his book and Leon Morris avoids this question in his commentary on 5:10. Compare René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 382, who refers to the great rock in Dan 2:35 which “fills all the earth”. See also Zec 14:9.

- 5 and the False Prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire at Christ's return. At the time when the devil is also thrown there, a 1000 years later, they are already there because the verb "left out" in the Greek text after "where" (ὅπου) in Rev 20:10 is no doubt the auxiliary "are" (εἶσιν), which is frequently omitted in the Greek language.
- 10 To circumvent a messianic kingdom after the return of Christ, supporters of Amillennialism are forced to claim that Satan has been bound since the death and resurrection of Christ and that Rev 20:1-3 has been fulfilled at the death and resurrection of the Lord.<sup>85</sup> Passages like Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1Jo 3:8 and Joh 12:31 are cited. We do not deny the testimony of Scripture that Satan has been defeated at the cross. It does not mean though that he has been bound at that time. If he was
- 15 imprisoned as it states in Rev 20:3, the inhabitants of this earth – including us – would not be tempted any more. Why then is Satan, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, still called *tempter* and *deceiver*? Why is Paul calling him *the prince of this world, the ruler of the air* and even as *the god of this world who darkens and blinds the hearts of men* (see Eph 2:1ff; 2Co 4:4ff)? Day and night, he tries to make Christians stumble. If the devil is already bound during the age of
- 20 the church, why is the apostle Peter warning us that the devil is roaming like a roaring lion seeking to devour whom he can (1Pe 5:8-9)? New Testament demonology shows us that a subset of fallen angels is imprisoned already (see 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6). In Rev 9:1ff it is suggested that during the time of the end-time judgements (i.e. the time of the Antichrist, see Rev 6–19) the abyss will be opened and many of these demons will be set free to torment unrepentant man. Their king is called
- 25 *Abaddon* (or *Apollyon* = *destroyer*) who is an angel (Rev 9:11), i.e. it is Satan. The story narrating the healing of the demon possessed Gerasene in Mar 5:8ff shows that demons are free and active on earth and are not all imprisoned in the abyss. Satan and his many angels are not bound since the death and resurrection of Christ, they operate within the limits that God has left them (*permissioniter*) until his time (see Rev 12:12; 2Th 2:9ff). René Pache objects to this amillennialist hypothesis of imprisonment rightly:
- 30

If it were thus, it would be necessary to confess that the messianic reign would indeed be lamentable, for Satan indeed gives little indication of being bound and prevented from seducing the nations. Or else, as someone has said, his chain is terribly long!<sup>86</sup>

- 35 A chain long enough to make it possible for him to roam like a roaring lion and to devour men.<sup>87</sup> The context of Rev 19–20 speaks against this anti-chiliastic view:<sup>88</sup> Rev 19:11-21 speaks of the visible return of Jesus Christ and the apprehension and condemnation of the Antichrist and the False Prophet. Is it then not arbitrary to interpret the following description of the binding of Satan, not as an event of the end-time, but retrospectively to the act of the crucifixion? Indeed, if the first
- 40 resurrection in Rev 20:5 is the physical<sup>89</sup> and not a spiritual resurrection, then the beginning (*terminus a quo* or *dies a quo*) of the 1000-year kingdom coincides with the moment of the return of Christ. With this the post- as well as the amillennialist interpretation are proved wrong, because *the rest of the dead who did not come to life until the thousand years were ended* (Rev 20:5) cannot be unbelievers who do not come back to life until the thousand years are ended, but rather dead
- 45 unbelievers who are waiting in Hades for the judgement of the white throne, which takes place after the 1000 years, to be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:13-15; see Isa 24:22). They should

<sup>85</sup> Compare in place of many holding this position W. J. Grier, op. cit., pp. 86-90.

<sup>86</sup> René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, op. cit., p. 384.

<sup>87</sup> We point to W. J. Grier, op. cit., p. 88, who justifies this with the following illustration: "The binding of Satan, therefore, does not mean the complete cessation of his activities. His case is like that of Al Capone, the captured gangster, of whom it was said that he ruled Chicago from Chicago jail."

<sup>88</sup> I.e. an interpretation that speaks against the 1000-year kingdom. The word is derived from the Greek adjective χίλιοι (*khilioi*) = 1000.

<sup>89</sup> The Greek word *Anástasis* (ἡ ἀνάστασις) normally stands for the physical resurrection which is still in the future (see 2Ti 2:18).

5 then rise only after the 1000 years. Their resurrection is spoken of by John as the *second death*, because their resurrection means eternal condemnation and separation from God, their creator, who is life. For those who take part in the first resurrection exactly the same verb is used.<sup>90</sup> Should their reanimation not be a physical resurrection? Contrary to this interpretation Alford objects correctly, that if in one passage where it speaks of two resurrections where some *souls* are raised at the beginning and *the other dead* are brought to life (*ezēsan*), at the end of a specific period; saying that in one and the same passage the first resurrection means a *spiritual resurrection in Christ*, whereas the second resurrection is a *literal resurrection from the grave* (a physical resurrection), this would be the end of all meaning of language and the Holy Scriptures would be extinguished as a definite testimony of anything. Alford insists that if the first resurrection is (only) spiritual, this applies also to the second. This – Alford continues – hardly anyone would claim. He concludes consequently, that if the second resurrection is to be understood literally (i.e. a physical resurrection), this then also applies to the first.<sup>91</sup> Chapter 20 of Revelation shows then that between the resurrection of the believers and the resurrection of the unbelievers lies a period of 1000 years during which Christ will reign with his people on this earth.<sup>92</sup> According to the Apocalypse of John the messianic kingdom will last for 1000 years.<sup>93</sup> That Rev 20 should be interpreted in this way and not differently, is also supported by Paul in the passage of 1Co 15:22-28.<sup>94</sup>

(b) *The parallel in 1Co 15:22-28 speaks also for an earthly messianic kingdom*

Hardly anyone will deny that this passage deals with the physical resurrection. As death came through one man, so also through one man comes the resurrection from the dead (V. 21; see Rom 5:12ff). As in Adam all die, so in Christ they shall be brought to life (V. 22: *all will be made alive*: ζωοποιηθήσονται [*zōopoiēthēsontai*: fut. passive]). As all men have to die in the first Adam (because they are sinners) so all shall be raised (physically) in the second Adam. This corresponds with Paul's words before Felix (Act 24:15): a general resurrection. The following verses 23-24 make us conclude that not everybody will be raised at the same time. *Each in his own turn*: (1) Christ the first-fruits (2) **then** those who belong to Christ at his return (3) **then** the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father... In the same way as there is a temporal interval (in the context explicitly between the resurrection and the return of Christ) between the resurrection of

<sup>90</sup> Namely ἔζησαν (*ezēsan* = *they came to life*); compare *resurrection* (*Anástasis* = ἡ ἀνάστασις) and *he shall live* (*zēsetai* = ζήσεται) in Joh 11:25.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, new edition (London: Longmans, Green; Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, 1894), 4: 732. (Original-quote: "If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *ψυχαὶ ἔζησαν* at the first, and the rest of the *νεκροὶ ἔζησαν* only at the end of a specified period after that first,—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave ;—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain : but if the second is literal, then so is the first...")

<sup>92</sup> We refer to the exegetical and theological analysis of Rev 19–20 by George Eldon Ladd, in 'Historic Premillennialism' in *The Meaning of the Millennium: four views*, ed. Robert G Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 33ff.

<sup>93</sup> According to 4Esra 7:28ff the days of the Messiah should last 400 years then he will die. In old Jewish literature there are other suggestions as to the duration of the messianic age: three generations, 100, 600, 2000, 6000 and also 1000 years (so Rabbi Elieser in connection to Psalms 90:15). Reference to Talmudic literature, compare Ferdinand Weber, *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften gemeinfaßlich dargestellt*, ed. Franz Delitzsch and Georg Schnedermann. Reprint of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. of Dörffling & Franke, Leipzig, 1897 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975), pp. 348-351, 372-373. Compare René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 390: "Moreover, we have already pointed out the fact that before the coming of the Lord the Jewish rabbis, basing their calculation on the Old Testament, had already fixed the duration of the messianic era at a thousand years. They based this opinion on the type of the Millennium which they could see in the sabbath of God."

<sup>94</sup> Compare Gerhard Gläser, op. cit., p. 625: "Not only John, but also Paul supports the idea of an intermediate kingdom of Christ, even if the 1000 years are not mentioned and the doctrine is not developed in 1Co 15, one of the most important chapters for theology and the testimony of Christ in the N. T. (Vv 23-28). The testimony of the two most important messengers of Jesus cannot remain neglected. The intermediate kingdom of a 1000 years is the last but one scene in the great plan of God's salvation and the healing of creation, where the evil of Satan's rebellion had entered." [We translated from German into English]

5 Christ as the first-fruits and those who belong to him brought out in *epeita* (ἐπειτα = *later, afterwards*), so the adverb *eita* (εἶτα = *afterwards, then*) suggests an interval between the resurrection of those who belong to Christ and the one at the end (τὸ τέλος [*telos* = *end*]), i.e. between the resurrection of believers and unbelievers.<sup>95</sup> Also in Rev 20:12-15 the resurrection of the unrighteous falls together with the end (i.e. after the 1000 years; compare 20:11: this earth and this heaven will have passed away). The text suggests the following interpretation: (1) Believers will be raised at the return of Christ (2) Unbelievers will only rise after a further undefined interval. This interval is identical with the time during which Christ reigns until all enemies are laid at his feet. The time-reference *until* (ἄχρι οὗ: v. 25) points to an interval between the return of Christ and the point of time when he will submit the kingdom to God, the Father. Paul sees the beginning of Christ's reign coinciding with the return of Christ. The same is suggested by Jesus, not only to the question of the disciples in Act 1:6-7 but also in the parable of the talents (see Luk 19:15). That the reign of Christ with his own cannot be related to the age of the church is also brought out by the words of Paul in Rom 16:20. Satan is not yet annihilated. God will put him under our feet soon, in the same way as the return of Christ is promised to happen soon in several passages (compare ἐν τάχει [*soon*] in Rom 16:20 with ἔρχομαι ταχύ [*I will come soon*] in Rev 22:12.20). The passages of 1Co 15:22-28 and Rev 19–20 are coherent, because Rev 19:15 shows that the defeat of the enemies begins at the return of the King of kings (see also 2Th 2:8; Zec 14:1ff). The return/epiphany of Christ as the beginning-point for the reign of Christ with his own is also given when it is said in Rev 2:26-27 that we shall rule when we have persevered to the end (see 2Ti 4:6-8). So passages like Isa 27:4; 65:20; Zec 14:18 or Mic 5:3ff become suddenly transparent. This is the time of the messianic kingdom, when according to 1Co 15:25-27, everything finally has to bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. This *iron rule* (see Psa 2:9; Isa 11:4; Rev 2:27; 19:15) will last until the Son himself will submit it to his Father. If there were no earthly messianic kingdom then Christ would never have reigned over this earth since the fall of man, because since that time Satan is the prince of this world and not everything is submitted to Jesus yet (see Heb 2:8). We believe therefore that the outward submission will only start with the return of Christ and that we are waiting for a messianic intermediate kingdom.

(b) Details of verses 4-6

35 **V. 4:** This speaks of two<sup>96</sup> groups: (1) those who sit on thrones and to whom judgement is given, (2) the souls of those who were beheaded because of their faith in Jesus and the Word of God, who had not worshiped the beast. "...*thrones on which were seated those who...*": Compare this with Dan 7:9.22 and the promise of Jesus to his disciples in Luk 22:29-30, according to which they will sit on thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. We are also reminded of Paul's words in 1Co 6:2-3 where it is said that the believers (saints) will judge the world (i.e. unbelievers) and the (fallen) angels. Whether this refers to the church only or also to the believers of the old covenant is not stated here. We prefer to leave this question open. The context of Rev 19–20 suggests that the church (the bride of Christ) is taken away (raptured) before the great tribulation (or at least before the end of the great tribulation) and rewarded (see 2Co 5:10) after which the wedding supper of the Lamb with the bride follows (Rev 19:7ff). Then Christ appears with his bride to reign with her and the resurrected martyrs for 1000 years on this earth (Rev 5:10; 20:4). The martyrs from the time of the Antichrist will be raised at the return of Christ, before or at the beginning of the millennium.

<sup>95</sup> Compare F. Godet, *Commentaire sur la Première Épître aux Corinthiens* (Neuchâtel : Attinger Frères ; Delachaux et Niestlé, 1887), 2 : 354-357.

<sup>96</sup> Some commentators speak even of three groups. So for instance Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 242: The first group V. 4a: all the redeemed, from Abel until the rapture of the church. The second group V. 4b: all the souls of martyrs of the great tribulation who have not yet received their resurrection body. The third group V. 4c: individual people/souls who have not worshipped the beast belonging to the martyrs of the last part of the great tribulation. With most commentators we believe that the beheaded are identical with those who did not worship the beast.

5 **Vv 5-6a:** “*This is the first resurrection*” (in Greek: ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη): This is the resurrection of the believers, whereas the resurrection of the unbelievers in verse 14 is called “*the second death*” (in Greek: ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος). As already explained above, the resurrection of the unbelievers will take place after the millennium, so to speak at the threshold of eternity. Probably the resurrection of the unbelievers is called “*second death*” and not “*second resurrection*” because  
 10 those in it are thrown into the lake of fire which means eternal condemnation. There is an interesting connection to the passage in Isa 26:7-19 (Isa 24–27 is referred to as the so-called Isaiah-Apocalypse): In Isa 26:14 the prophet says: “*The dead will not live, the shadows [spirits] will not rise*”, in Isa 26:19 he says (expression of faith): “*But your dead will live; their bodies will rise.*” There are critical commentators who see here a contradiction which they attribute to different  
 15 authors<sup>97</sup> of these verses. If one holds to a messianic intermediate kingdom between the return of Christ and the commencement of eternity, this seeming contradiction finds a plausible explanation: Believers in Yahweh (Isa 26:19) will be raised by the *dew of light* (probably a symbol of the Holy Spirit: compare with Isa 32:15) and share in his kingdom (Isa 24:23; 25:6-8; 26:1-2), whereas the departed unbelievers (Isa 26:14) are not brought back to life to take part in the events on earth  
 20 (compare the shadows in Isa 14:20-21 with the shadows of Isa 26:14 and 26:19!). This is not to say that the unbelievers will not rise at all, because this would contradict passages like Dan 12:2; Joh 5:28-29; Act 24:15 and Rev 24:5-6.14. Isaiah is only saying that the unbelieving dead are not brought back to life or raised (Isa 26:14) to be involved in the events on earth (Isa 14:21). That unbelievers will also be raised is suggested in Isa 24:21-22; at the appearance of Yahweh (Isa  
 25 24:23; 26:21) they will be shut up in prison and only “*after many days*” punished/taken to account (Isa 24:22). In Rev 20:4-6.13-15 it is spelled out that this judgement takes place after the 1000-year reign of Christ. Notice the analogy between “*your dead will live*” in Isa 26:19 and “*they came to life*” in Rev 20:4 as well as “*shadows [spirits] will not rise*” in Isa 26:14 and “*the rest of the dead did not come to life (until the thousand years were ended)*” in Rev 20:5.<sup>98</sup>

30 **V. 6b:** “*They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years*”: While this is the only explicit statement concerning the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, this does by no means justify – as some Amillennialists think – denying an earthly kingdom of Christ. Details concerning this age are found in many passages of the Old Testament. Here are  
 35 some examples: Isa 2; 4; 11; 27:2-6; 65:18-25; Eze 37; 39:25-29; 40–48; Zec 14 etc.

## b.) Satan finally judged: Vv 7-10

In verse 7 it says that Satan will be let loose after 1000 years. In verse 3 with even more precision: “*...until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.*” The  
 40 question of course arises, why does the devil have to be set free at all? In Rev 20:1-3 it says that the devil will be bound during the 1000 years so that men (who have survived the judgements of the great tribulation and are going with their earthly body into the millennium) may not be tempted anymore. During this age Satan will not be able to tempt mankind into sin as he did with the first couple (see Gen 3). During the age of the millennium it should become manifest that sinful man  
 45 tends to sin by his own lust (see Jam 1:13-15), even if the devil is not there to tempt him. Mankind should realise its corruption since the fall in Eden (see Gen 3; Psa 51:7; Rom 5:12; 8:21-25). Men who sin during the age of the millennium (despite the absence of Satan) risk to be judged (see Isa 65:20; Zec 14:17-19). In the age of the thousand-year kingdom man will not be able to blame his guilt simply on Satan, who will be bound and not be able to act and be of influence. The fact that Satan succeeds again after a short time of being set loose, to incite man against God and his city,  
 50 shows what man is like when not renewed by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>97</sup> There are critical exegetes who see up to 10 authors for the passage Isa 24–27 alone! Compare the first chapter of our dissertation mentioned above.

<sup>98</sup> It is significant that the verbs used for *reanimation* (or resurrection) in Isa 26 and Rev 20:4-6 have exactly the same basic meaning: in Hebrew חָיָה (*khaya* = *to live*), and in Greek ζᾶω (*zaō* = *to live*).

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**V. 8:** “*Gog and Magog*”: The names *Gog* and *Magog* are borrowed from Eze 38–39, which does not mean that the same event is in mind. In Eze 38:1 *Magog* is a country whereas *Gog* is a ruler. This differentiation is not made here. Added to that, in Eze 38:6.15 and 39:2 *Gog* comes from the *far north*, whereas in Revelation *Gog and Magog* come from the *four corners of the earth*. It is obvious that the names borrowed from the book of Ezekiel (enemies of Israel) are representative for the whole of mankind who are hostile to God.

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**V. 9:** “*...the city he loves*”: doubtless this refers to Jerusalem. Compare: Psa 78:68; 87:2; Isa 62:1. During the millennium Jerusalem will be the centre of the world. Christ will reign there (Isa 24:23), from him the word will go out (Isa 2:1-5) and people will gather to him to worship him (Isa 27:13; Zec 14:16). Those who will stage through Satan a revolt against the Lord and his city will be people who, despite Christ’s presence on earth, remain in their rebellious attitude (see Isa 11:4; 65:20; Zec 14:17-19). Compare the mention of an *iron rod* in Rev 19:15 with Isa 11:4.

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**V. 10:** Finally Satan will be eliminated forever. After this last revolt, he will be thrown into the lake of fire where (1000 years before) the Antichrist and the False Prophet were thrown already (see Rev 19:20). Here the promise from Gen 3:15 (compare Rom 16:20; Isa 27:1) will find the final fulfilment. Jesus said to his disciples that the world is now judged and that the devil will be thrown out (Joh 12:31). At the cross he defeated the devil (Col 2:14-15), which does not mean that he is already eliminated at that time. Paul speaks of his final crushing as an event *still in the future* (Rom 16:20). After the millennium he will finally be thrown to the place prepared for him and his angels (see Mat 25:41; 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6): hell, the lake of fire, the place of eternal pain (Rev 14:10), the inextinguishable fire (Isa 64:24; Mar 9:48; compare Heb 12:29). At this point of time there are seemingly no people (beside the Antichrist and the False Prophet) in hell. They will be judged after the elimination of Satan and at the end of the world (Rev 20:11ff). “*Fire from heaven*” compares with the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24).

### c.) The white throne – judgement of unbelievers: Vv 11-15

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The scene of final judgement – that of unbelievers before the white throne – concludes the millennium i.e. follows the same. It forms so to speak the transition between the millennium and the new creation and eternity. This is now the judgement of passed away unbelievers.

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**V. 11:** While the judgement of the church is held before the judgement seat of Christ, that of the unbelievers takes place before the great white throne. It could also mean here that the colour *white* hints at the justice of the judgements of God. “*And he who was seated on it*”: The majority of commentators believe that this refers to God (the Father) while others identify him with Jesus Christ, the Son. So for instance William MacDonald; he points to Joh 5:22.27: Jesus says to the disciples that the Father has given him authority to judge.<sup>99</sup> Possibly Alexander<sup>100</sup> is right when he says, that even if Rev 20 does not say who is sitting on the throne, the total of biblical references show that God the Father (see Rev 4:2.9; 5:1.7.13; 6:16; 7:10.15; 19:4; 21:5) and God the Son (see Joh 5:19-27; 12:47-48; Act 10:42; 17:31; Jud 14-15) will sit there together (see Joh 10:30; 14:23; Rev 3:21; 5:13). Compare Rev 20:11-12 with the description in Dan 7:9-13, where also two persons are named: *The Ancient of Days* (Vv 10.13) will refer to the Father and *one like a Son of Man*, is of course Jesus Christ. The name *Son of Man* for Jesus is believed to be an allusion to this passage in the book of Daniel. The Father has handed the judgement over to his Son; this does not exclude the presence of the Father. “*Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place [anymore] for them*”: This refers to the end of the world and the dissolution of this creation as a whole. In the Old Testament (by the prophets) as well as the New Testament (by Jesus and the

<sup>99</sup> William MacDonald, op. cit., 1194. Compare also John F. Walvoord, op. cit., p. 982.

<sup>100</sup> John H. Alexander, op. cit., p. 359.

5 apostles) the dissolution of this creation is announced. Rev 20:11 shows that the fulfilment of this prophecy will take place after the millennium: compare to the theme of the dissolution of this creation Psa 102:27; Isa 24:19-20; 34:4; 51:6; 65:17; Mat 24:35; Mar 13:31; Luk 21:33; 2Pe 3:7.10-12; Rev 21:1.

10 **V. 12:** “*And I saw the dead, great and small*”: In other words: nobody will escape from this judgement. It has to be understood that this is the judgement of the lost, those who do not appear in the book of life, which is also mentioned here. On this earth the rich and powerful are too often in positions of advantage. Even in the so-called civilised West people with titles and positions or connections or money can circumvent the law. But God does not show favouritism to anyone (Rom

15 2:11): poor or rich, little or great, white or black... all will be judged by the same standard, namely his Word. Rom 2:16: “*The day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*” The dead who appear here before the white throne to be judged are identical with *the rest of the dead* from verse 5, who were not raised to partake in the 1000-year kingdom. One could say, that here all men are judged who do not partake in the so-called *first resurrection*, i.e.

20 the resurrection of the redeemed. “*...and books were opened. Another book was opened*”: First it speaks of *books* (plural) and then of *another book* (singular). What is the difference between these? In *the books* the works (V. 12c) of those are recorded, who will be judged, whereas *the other book* is the book of life (V. 12b). Why is the book of life referred to in this place? Jesus had said, that those who believe in him will not come into judgement (Joh 3:18). The book of life is opened

25 before the white throne as a testimony. Those whose names are not recorded in the book of life (see Rev 17:8), are those who have not accepted the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Therefore their sins are not forgiven and consequently they are judged on the basis of their works. Because on the basis of works nobody can be justified, because all (since Adam) are sinners, all those people, who are not recorded in the book of life, will be lost. Here this judgement is pronounced to them. The works

30 of the individual will decide on the measure of punishment. We are reminded in this place that there will be differences in relation to the severity of judgement for the lost (see for instance Mat 10:15; 11:20-24; Luk 12:47-48) as also in relation to the reward of the redeemed in heaven (see for instance 1Co 3:13-15; possibly 2Pe 1:11). “*According to their works*”: If this passage is interpreted in isolation to the rest of Holy Scripture, one could assume, falsely, that man can be saved on the

35 basis of his own works. Other passages of Scripture express clearly, that this is not possible (see for instance Gal 2:16). The law can lead to consciousness of sin (Rom 3:20), but it cannot save. Salvation is only possible through the grace of God (Eph 2:8-10), by faith in Christ's work of redemption on our behalf (Rom 3:21-23). Lost are those who have rejected God's gracious offer of salvation (see Joh 5:24; 16:9), having preferred to remain in their sins (see Joh 3:18-21; 2Th 2:10-12). Anyone not receiving grace and with it the forgiveness of one's (mis)deeds will automatically

40 be judged by his deeds or works (see Mat 16:27; Rom 2:6; 1Pe 1:17). The following question may still arise: What will happen to those people who are born during the millennium or who live at the end of the millennium in their physical bodies? Holy Scripture does not speak on this issue directly. On the basis of other statements though it should be clear that those who accept Christ as Lord

45 during that time will not have to appear before the white throne (see Joh 3:18 and 5:24).

**V. 13:** “*The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them...*”: Why this mention of the sea, of death and of Hades? The reason may be that for Jews at that time it was a terrible thought to be thrown into the sea. So it must not be surprising that in

50 old-Jewish literature the recapture of the body of a man played a major role. With Beasley-Murray<sup>101</sup> and other commentators we think that this is a reference to the fact that finally all men will rise, no matter how they died or where they were buried. To give an extreme example: even if someone is eaten and digested by a shark and the excrements are mixed with the waters of the sea,

<sup>101</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1306.

- 5 this man will rise bodily!<sup>102</sup> Walvoord is probably right when he interprets the words: “*And death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them...*” in such a way that the physical bodies of those, not saved, will be united with the spirits [or souls] of those in Hades. In the Apocalypse of John *death* and *Hades* always go together (see 1:18; 6:8; 20:14).
- 10 **V. 14:** “*The second death*” was already mentioned in verse 6. It is identical with eternal death, the *eternal condemnation* in the *lake of fire*. One could of course also say that it is identical with the second resurrection, because the first resurrection is the one for the redeemed (V. 6) unto eternal life. That not only believers but also unbelievers will be raised is confirmed (as mentioned above) through passages like Dan 12:2; Joh 5:29 and Act 24:15.
- 15 **V. 15:** “*The book of life*” serves as an absolute criterion for the final state of each man: saved are all people, who are recorded in this book, i.e. everybody who accepts salvation in Jesus Christ by faith (see 1Jo 5:4.12-13).

#### d.) Eternal condemnation, annihilation or salvation of all?

- 20 If God is a God of love, can he be so cruel, that he leaves even one of his creatures in eternal pain and punishment? This question is also discussed among evangelicals. There are atheists who not only deny the existence of the devil and hell but even that of God. Then there are liberal and so-called “humanistic” influenced theologians who may believe in God, but not the existence of Satan and even less that of hell. Other theologians again believe in the existence of God and that of Satan,
- 25 but not in an eternal condemnation. They rather surmise that a God of love will not allow one of his creatures<sup>103</sup> to suffer eternally. They speculate therefore that God, in the end, will save all creatures. One speaks of the so-called “*apokatástasis*”, the final *restoration* of all things. Others suggest, so to speak, a compromise; they claim that the punishment of hell is limited to 1000 years and then the condemned would be extinguished, i.e. exist no more (annihilation).<sup>104</sup> Others again
- 30 teach, that unbelievers, after suffering certain punishment (possibly during the 1000 years), will in the end be pardoned and admitted to eternal life.<sup>105</sup> All these suggestions do not do justice to the testimony of Holy Scripture.
- 35 • The punishment of the condemned does not cease after 1000 years: Rev 20:10 states that in the moment (after the millennium) when Satan is thrown into the lake of fire, the beast and the False Prophet will still be there. The expression *forever and ever* in Rev 14:11 cannot be interpreted in such a way that after an age (aeon) of punishment finally in the end there should follow pardon; in Greek there are two forms of plural (εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων = *from aeons to aeons*).
  - 40 • Isaiah speaks of a fire that will never be extinguished (Isa 66:24). John the Baptist (Joh 3:12) as well as Jesus (Mar 9:43.48) seem to allude to this passage in Isaiah.
  - Daniel says that some will rise to *eternal* life and others to *eternal* condemnation. Since in the Hebrew language the same word (עֹלָם [‘*ōlām*]) is used for the duration of both states it would be rather arbitrary to interpret the one as eternal and the other as limited in time. This argument

<sup>102</sup> Compare John F. Walvoord: “The mention of ‘the sea’ giving up its dead makes it clear that regardless of how far a body has disintegrated, it will nevertheless be resurrected for this judgment.”

<sup>103</sup> These include angels and therefore also Satan. He however became through his fall *Satan* (derived from the Hebrew שָׂטָן [‘*śāṭān*] = *enemy, opponent*).

<sup>104</sup> See for example Werner Schulz, *Meine Zukunft hat einen Namen: Jesus* (Überlingen, Germany: Werner Schulz, self-publisher [2000]), pp. 302-303. He says (page 303): “Final annihilation: yes. Eternal torment: no.” (The German original text: „Endgültiges Ausgelöschtsein: Ja. Eine ewige Qual: Nein.“)

<sup>105</sup> Compare for instance the doctrine of purgatory and penance in the Catholic Church against which Luther protested. Adherents of this heresy base their arguments among others on the passage 1Co 3:13-15, interpreting it contrary to context.



5 of analogy by the way applies to several other expressions in the Bible (see for instance Mat 25:41.46).

10 The fact, that according to the testimony of Holy Scripture there is an eternal condemnation, should motivate not only missionary societies but each individual believer to witnessing and evangelisation.

## 4. New creation and eternal state: Chapters 21:1–22:5

15 Commentators are not agreed whether the descriptions of the new heaven, the new earth and the New Jerusalem in these verses are to be taken literally or if the whole is to be seen as a symbolic picture for eternity. In other words: will there be gold and precious stones in the new creation or not? Will the new creation be wholly immaterial? Speaking against a totally immaterial notion is the testimony of the Holy Scripture that Jesus had a body after his resurrection (one speaks of a *body of glory*), which one could touch and that he ate food to show his disciples that he was not a phantom: see Luk 24:39-43; Joh 20:27-29; 21:9-13; compare Act 10:41. Some commentators<sup>106</sup> hold the view that only the statements of 21:1-8 refer to the eternal state, whereas the descriptions of 21:9–22:5, so they believe, speak of the 1000-year kingdom. The New Jerusalem in 21:1-5 refers to eternity, whereas the Jerusalem of 21:9–22:5 to the millennium, i.e. the New Jerusalem would already exist during the millennium, hovering over the earth. The glorified believers would then reign over mankind during the millennium from this New Jerusalem, as they still have an ordinary physical body. Supporters of this hypothesis marshal the following arguments:

- 25 • Descriptions in 21:24-27 fit better to the millennium (where evils still exist) than to eternity.
- The leaves of the tree of life (in Greek *tree* is singular) in 22:2 serve for the healing of the nations. This would rather apply to the millennium. Does the resurrection body still need healing?
- 30 • The city is described as being surrounded by a wall (21:12ff). In the new creation, where there is no more evil, it does not need a wall.

These arguments really need to be thought of. We think with many other commentators, that it is not impossible to interpret these passages as descriptions of the eternal state. 21:27 does not necessarily mean that in the creation referred to in the portion 21:9–22:5, there is still sin or man not resurrected to new life. 21:27 in the light of 21:8 can be understood, that the godless will not enter the new creation but have to stay outside (22:15) and are thrown into hell (21:8). The river in Eze 47:1-12 we believe actually relates to the millennium. In this passage it speaks in verse 12 of trees on both sides of the river whose fruit serve as food and the leaves as medicine. Whereas the river of Eze 47 comes from within the temple (V. 1), there is no temple (see Rev 21:22) anymore in the Jerusalem of which Rev 21:9–22:5 speaks. Possibly the tree and its fruit and leaves in Rev 22:2 is to be understood symbolically, referring back to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden of Gen 2, or the case can be explained with Walvoord<sup>107</sup> and other commentators as a frequent phenomenon of Holy Scripture, where prophets or seers often see two ages overlapping. Some example of this phenomenon: in Isa 61:1-2 (compare with Luk 4:17-19) the prophet speaks of the first and second coming of Jesus in one statement. In Dan 12:2 and Joh 5:29 the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous is named together without mentioning the time interval between the two. In Rev 20:5 it speaks of the time interval between the two resurrections (also hinted at in 1Co 15:23-24). In Isa 65:17 the prophet speaks of new heavens and a new earth, whereas the Jerusalem described in verses 18-25 is glorious but not yet perfect, as it still speaks of sin and death (V. 20) as well as the bearing of children (V. 23). Indeed the New Jerusalem in verse 18 in contrast to the heavens

<sup>106</sup> So for instance G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, pp. 1307-1309.

<sup>107</sup> John F. Walvoord, op. cit., pp. 983-984.

5 and the earth in verse 17 is not characterised with the attribute *new* (Hebrew: חדש [chādāš]). As far as we are concerned, we are not certain, whether the overlapping view of the prophet (apocalyptic) is applicable to the passage Rev 21:9–22:5. Walvoord is of the opinion that chapter 20 has to be interpreted chronologically: Chapter 19 return, chapter 20 Satan bound (Vv 1-3), then the resurrection of believers and the millennium (Vv 4-6), followed by the condemnation of Satan (V. 10) and the resurrection and condemnation of unbelievers (Vv 11-15). In chapter 20 John gives the events a clear order through prepositions and conjunctions (*until [the 1000 years]; not yet; after [the 1000 years]*). This knowledge was not yet given to the prophets of the Old Testament (see 1Pe 1:10-11). When it says in Rev 20:11 that the old creation has disappeared and in 21:1-2 it speaks of a new heaven, a new earth and a New Jerusalem, why should the descriptions in 21:1–22:5 include two different overlapping (telescopic view) ages (namely millennium and eternity)? However that may be, we prefer for the following reasons to place not only 21:1-8 but also 21:9–22:5 within eternity:

- As already mentioned, there shall be no temple in the Jerusalem here described (21:22). During the millennium there will be a temple in Jerusalem (Isa 66:20; Joe 3:17-18 [4:17-18]; Mic 4:2; Zec 14:8-21).
- In the Jerusalem of Rev 21:9–22:5 there will be no more sun nor moon necessary (21:23). This does not apply to the time of the millennium: during that age there still will be summer and winter, rain, blessing and curse, etc.: compare for instance Isa 65:18-22; Eze 47; Zec 14:8.17 etc.

In the following we have to attend to the individual passages:

### a.) New heaven, new earth and a New Jerusalem: Chapter 21:1-8

30 **V. 1:** Announced in Psa 102:27; Isa 51:6.16; 65:17; 66:22; Mat 24:35; Mar 13:31; Luk 21:33 and 2Pe 3:12-13. Satan (and his angels) sinned in heaven (see Isa 14:9-14; Eze 28:14-16; 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 12:3-4.7-9) and deceived man on earth into the same rebellion against the creator (Gen 3). Possibly for this reason, not only this present earth but also the heavens are kept for judgement and destruction (compare 2Pe 3:7).<sup>108</sup> “*There was no longer any sea*”: What is indispensable for our survival in this creation (also in the millennium there will still be seas: see Psa 72:8; Isa 11:9.11; Eze 47 several times; 48:28; Zec 9:10; 14:8), will not be necessary anymore in the new creation.

40 **V. 2:** “*The holy city, the New Jerusalem*”: see also Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10; 12:22; Rev 3:12. “*...prepared as a bride*”: Unger says: “This is an oriental custom, to see the city of a ruler in the picture of a wife married to him.”<sup>109</sup>

**V. 3:** Now that evil (the godless, death as well as Satan and his own) are eliminated, God finally can dwell among man (compare 1Co 15:24-28). This verse has to be seen in connection with 21:22.

45 **Vv 4-6:** The consequences of sin will finally be taken away (fulfilment of Isa 25:8a). The curse of Gen 3 (see Isa 24:5-6.20) is finally revoked by God. He who sits on the throne and makes all things new, he is the *Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End*. This is Christ (see 1:8; 22:13), who has created everything (Joh 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-3).

50 **Vv 7-8:** Those who are allowed to partake in this new creation (V. 7) and those who are excluded from it (V. 8; compare 22:15).

<sup>108</sup> Compare with John H. Alexander, op. cit., p. 364.

<sup>109</sup> Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 247. We translated from German into English.

## 5 **b.) Description of the New Jerusalem: Chapters 21:9–22:5**

### **(1) The holy city coming down from heaven: Chapter 21:9-11**

Verses 1-8 of this chapter could be described as a kind of prologue: The New Jerusalem, seen in 21:3 coming down – as a bride adorned – is now further described in 21:9–22:5. The “what/content” of the announcement “*I am making everything new*” in 21:5 is now specified. The vision of the bride, the New Jerusalem, is introduced as that of the prostitute Babylon: compare 17:1-3 with 21:9-10. Seen from a mountain great and high (V. 10: see Eze 40:2) the New Jerusalem contrasts with the prostitute Babylon seen by John in the desert (17:1-3). Wonderful and beautiful (precious stones, gold, etc.) is the description of the New Jerusalem as also of the prostitute Babylon in 17:4; 18:11-17. But the New Jerusalem, the bride, is holy (21:10), whereas Babylon the mother of all prostitutes is unclean (see 18:3).

John now tries to put what he has seen into understandable words for his contemporaries (and for us). The city shines like a precious jewel, like crystal clear jasper. The bride of the Lamb is identical with the holy city Jerusalem coming down from heaven to the new earth (V. 10). With Bonnet we think it possible that this is to be understood that the new earth – with Jerusalem at its centre – will be the new residence of the glorified believers:<sup>110</sup>

### **(2) Description of the city and the life within: Chapters 21:12–22:5**

#### *(a) Its walls: Chapter 21:12-14*

The 12 gates of the city are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and on them 12 angels (i.e. one angel for each gate) are standing. The 12 foundations of the wall again are inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. We assume that the number 12 symbolises the full number, the tribes pointing to the people of the Old Testament and the 12 apostles to the people of the new covenant; they are mentioned in the same way in the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb in 15:3. We are reminded also of the 144'000 Israelites (12 x 12'000) in 7:1-8 and the 144'000 followers of the Lamb in 14:1-5 and passages like Luk 22:30 and Eph 2:20.

#### *(b) The measurements of the city and the wall: Chapter 21:15-17*

The city is described as square, but because it says that its length, width and height are the same, we probably have to think of a cube. Nineveh and Babylon in the ancient world were also built in a square form. The New Jerusalem is even described in a three-dimensional way. The cube goes as a symbol for perfection. We are reminded that the “most holy” in the temple of Jerusalem also had the measurements of a cube (see 1Ki 6:19-20). The city measured 12'000 *stadia* (the number 12 also here as a symbol of wholeness?): Does it refer to the circumference (so Bonnet: he thinks 4 x 3000 stadia or 4 x 555 km = 2220 km circumference) or does it mean that length, width and height are 12'000 stadia each (Gläser, Walvoord)? Gläser points to the Jewish opinion according to which the vault of heaven should be 12'000 stadia above the earth. Let it be mentioned that some commentators are thinking rather of a pyramidal (Walvoord) than a cube-like (Unger) city. Because of its symbolism (form of a cube, number 12) we also think rather of a cube, although we have to admit that with a cube like form a wall is difficult to imagine, as Alexander rightly remarks.

<sup>110</sup> Compare Louis Bonnet, op. cit., 440.

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**V. 17:** the wall measures 144 cubits by man's measurement. An ordinary cubit equals 50 cm. The wall would then be 70 meters high. There may also be deep symbolical meaning behind this figure:  $144 = 12 \times 12$ . The wall guarantees absolute protection and security.

(c) *The materials and the glory of the city: Chapter 21:18-21*

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Compare this description (gold and precious stones) with passages like Exo 24:10 (the throne of Yahweh) and Isa 54:11-12 (in our opinion the Jerusalem of the millennium). It is interesting that of the jewels enumerated in connection with the foundation of the wall, seven of these belonged also to the ephod of the high priest Aaron (see Exo 28:17-20). Six of these are mentioned in connection with the fall of the Cherub (Satan) when he became proud (see Eze 28:12-13).

15

(d) *A temple and light giving stars are no more necessary: Chapter 21:22-23*

While there should still be a temple during the millennium (see Eze 40–48), this is no more the case in the new creation (see Isa 60:19-20). The reason lies in the fact that God himself will now finally dwell among men (see Rev 21:3), and they will see him face to face (cf. Rev 22:3-4). Incidentally this is a further argument that not only 21:1-8, but also the passage 21:9–22:5 relates to the new creation and eternity. Until now no man can see God the Father (see 1Ti 1:17; 6:16), only Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, has already seen him (Joh 1:18). In the New Jerusalem he will live in the midst of the redeemed. Then he will be all in all (1Co 15:28).

20

(e) *The inhabitants of the city: Chapter 21:24-27*

Compare these descriptions in relation to the nations in verses 24-26 with Isa 60:3.5.11 and with the pilgrimage (related to the millennium) in Zec 14:16ff. *Sun and moon* are no more necessary in the new city. The stars were made on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of creation (Gen 1:14). During the first three days the earth existed apparently without them. In eternity they are not necessary altogether, because the Father will shine with his glory (see Jam 1:17: *Father of light*) in the city and the Lamb will be his lamp (compare Joh 8:12: Jesus says: *"I am the light of the world"*). As the earth didn't need any light from the stars at the beginning, it will also be superfluous in the new creation. This also points out, how useless it is to worship the stars (compare passages in this connection like Deu 4:19; 17:3; 2Ki 21:4-5; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Eze 8:16; Zep 1:5). *"The nations"*: We are reminded of 7:9: *"...out of all nations, tribes, peoples and languages."* Paradox: *"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there."* Thieves are named in Scripture often in connection with the night. Because nothing unclean can enter the city, neither anyone who sins (V. 27) – these have been thrown into the lake of fire (21:8; 22:15) – it is not necessary to close the gates of the city anymore. In the new creation there is nothing to be feared!

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(f) *Paradise regained: Chapter 22:1-5*

What man lost after the fall (Gen 3), namely life in the Garden of Paradise (Gen 2), is restored to him in the New Jerusalem, granted again in the new creation. Life in the heavenly paradise though will be on a higher level than the one in an earthly Eden ever could have been.

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**V. 1:** *"...a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal..."*: With Seiss, Walvoord and others we believe that this river is not identical with those referred to in the passages Joe 3:18 (4:18); Eze 47:1.12 and Zec 14:8. These passages speak of the millennium whereas the new creation is described here. The following differences support this interpretation:

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- 5 • The river mentioned in the passages Joe 3:18 (4:18); Eze 47 and Zec 14:8 flows from the temple and merges into the sea.<sup>111</sup> In the new creation the sea is no more (Rev 21:1). The river mentioned here does not flow into the sea; rather it flows through the city.
- Whereas the river mentioned in the passages Joe 3:18 (4:18), Eze 47 and Zec 14:8 flows from the temple in Jerusalem, the one mentioned here flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.
- 10 There is no more Temple here (see 21:22).

The river reminds us of course also of the one in the earthly Garden of Eden which branched into four headwaters (Gen 2:10-14). Is this a literal river with water or is it to be understood as a symbol of life from God through the Spirit only? We hesitate to commit ourselves on this point. It is called the *river of the water of life*. God alone can give true and lasting life. God is life *per se*. The words in Joh 7:37-39 explain that *water* can stand as a symbol for *the Spirit* or *life in the Spirit*. Compare also the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman (Joh 4:14). The river has its source in the throne of God and the Lamb: This shows that all life comes from him. The Holy Spirit also comes from them both (see Joh 14:16; Joh 16:7; Joh 4:24; 2Co 3:17).<sup>112</sup>

20 **V. 2:** “...in the middle [i.e. of the city] of the place [or street]. On each side of the river stood the tree of life...”: This place or street was already mentioned in 21:21. The paradox is that the tree stands here in the singular (ξύλον). How a tree can stand on both sides of a river is difficult to imagine. We expect that also this description and choice of words has a deep significance. Bonnet

25 probably rightly says, that the tree here has to be understood in a collective sense (compare also Eze 47:12). We however assume that John does not prefer the singular form for no reason, because in this place the *tree of life* is a reminiscence of the one in the earthly Garden of Eden. After the fall into sin Adam and Eve were explicitly forbidden to eat of the tree of life and they were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:22-24). Here redeemed man is in the paradise of the new creation.

30 The tree of life is present again and they are allowed to eat from it (compare the promise in Rev 2:7; 22:14; warning in 22:19). In the context of the new creation no mention is made of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Evil is passé. We cannot say with final certainty whether the eating of its fruit and leaves is meant literally or symbolically. Is it to be interpreted only spiritually, that God gives lasting life in the way in which Jesus says: “*I am the bread of life...*” (Joh 6:48-51)? Or

35 do we have to think of real fruit and leaves? We are reminded that Jesus promised his disciples, that he will eat and drink with them in his kingdom: see Mat 8:11; Luk 13:28-29; Luk 22:16-18; compare Isa 25:6. We mention again passages like Luk 24:42-43; Joh 21:12-13 and Act 10:41, that show that Jesus could eat also in his resurrected body. In the same way incidentally he (with his angels) could eat even before his incarnation as his visit of Abraham in Gen 18:1ff clearly shows.

40 “*The leaves of the tree are [serve] for the healing of the nations*”: Commentators (as mentioned above) who interpret 21:1–22:5 as referring to the millennium and not to the state of eternity, see in this statement an argument for their view: If it still speaks here of healing, does it not mean that at this time sickness and death are still realities? This argument has to be taken seriously. It has to be said though, that it does not speak of sickness in these verses. The Greek word *θεραπεία*

45 (*therapeía*: is the root word in English and other western languages of *therapy* and *therapeutically*) can express *healing* as well as *care*. So it does not mean that there is still sickness, sorrow and death in the “world” described here. Together with McDonald and other expositors we assume that we have here a picture description of the enjoyment of eternal health or eternal life. The fruit and leaves come from the tree of life. If they are life sustaining, then only for this reason, that they

50 come from the Lord and it is he who gives life and sustains it.

<sup>111</sup> In Eze 47 the Dead Sea is mentioned, in Zec 14:8 it says that one part of the river will flow into the eastern sea (= Dead Sea) and another into the western sea (= Mediterranean). In Joe 3:18 (4:18) it says that the river will flow into the valley of acacias.

<sup>112</sup> The so-called *filioque* (= Latin: *and of the son*), that means the dogma that the Holy Spirit emerges from the Father and the Son.

5 **Vv 3-5:** “*No longer will there be any curse*”: This may indirectly answer the question which arose on the mention of *healing* in verse 2. Every curse is taken away including sickness, sorrow and death. Healing in the sense of recuperation from sickness will have no place in the new creation. Since the fall of first man (Gen 3) Satan has become the prince of this world and those who do not accept salvation in Christ are his servants, his slaves. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem will  
 10 serve God and the Lamb only; now it will be possible for them to see the face of the Father, which is impossible for man up to now (1Ti 6:16). Those thrown into the lake of fire are the ones who followed the serpent and/or bear the sign of the beast on their foreheads (Rev 13:16; 14:9), whereas the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem – in contrast – have received the name of God engraved in their foreheads. This has to be understood as a sign of belonging (see Rev 9:4). *The Lord God will*  
 15 *give them light*, so that there will be no other light necessary; compare 21:23. “*And they will reign forever and ever*”: The reign of the believers with Christ (over the gentiles: see Rev 2:26-27) during the 1000 years (see Rev 5:10; 20:4.6) will merge into the submission of the kingdom through the Son to the Father, and then God will be all in all (1Co 15:24-28) and our rule with the triune God will last into all eternity (Rev 22:5). There will be no one anymore to challenge the  
 20 reign of God and his own; all opponents are eliminated.

## 5. Epilogue: Chapter 22:6-21

### a.) Confirmation of the prophecy through an angel: Vv 6-9

We can rely on this message because it is of divine origin. As already in 19:10 the angel refuses to be worshipped by John. After the following verse 10 it seems that the Lord (not an angel) is again  
 25 taking up the word as in chapter 1; after verse 12 this is certainly the case.

### b.) The command not to seal the book: Vv 10-11

Compare this with 1:11.19. Daniel the Old Testament apocalyptic was still commanded to seal his book with visions, because their content concerns the end-time which had not yet come at that  
 30 time. But now, since the coming of Jesus into this world, the time has come near (see Mat 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 26:18.45; Luk 21:31) and the *last things* should not be sealed anymore. Therefore is says in the first beatitude in 1:3 “*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*”

### c.) The last promise in the Bible: Vv 7.12.20

35 “*Behold, I am coming soon!*” Therefore the words of this prophecy are not to be sealed.

### d.) The last revelations in the Bible: Vv 13-16

**V. 13:** Compare with 1:8 and 22:6. This is an allusion to the eternity of the Son of God.

**V. 14:** This is the last of seven beatitudes in Revelation. The tree of life points to 2:7 and 22:2 as well as back to Gen 2:9.  
 40

**V. 15:** Here another warning is inserted, to men who persist in their sin, as is also the case – in the midst of the description of the New Jerusalem – in 21:8.

45 **V. 16:** Jesus the root and offspring of David: compare Psa 110:1; Isa 11:1; Rom 1:3; 15:12. “*Bright Morning Star*”: Compare this with the prophecy of Balaam in Num 24:17.

## 5 e.) The last invitation in the Bible: V. 17

The Lord calls through his Spirit (see Heb 3:7-8; Joh 16:9ff). He does not compel. He gives freely: “*And whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life.*” Compare this offer of grace, to receive salvation without payment already in Isa 55:1ff. The blood of Jesus is more precious than gold or silver (see 1Pe 1:19-20). He who receives him will be saved. This call of the Lord to accept  
10 salvation sounds here for the last time.

## f.) The last warning in the Bible: Vv 18-19

These words are a serious warning to all those, who presume to change or twist the Holy Word of God: compare with Deu 4:2; 12:32. This includes also all man-made (not decreed by God) rules and regulations: compare Jesus’ critique against the Pharisees and scribes in Mat 15:1-9. Compare  
15 this warning also with Pro 30:5-6. The Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) constitutes the first book of the Bible (the so-called *Torah*: the law), Revelation of John the last. The Lord has arranged it fittingly: The warning of arbitrary changes of his Word in the first (for the Old Testament) and in the last book (for the New Testament) is incidentally one of many references to the claim by the Bible itself, to be the inspired Word of God. More to that in the subject: *Inspiration* in the context  
20 of Bibliology.

## g.) The last prayer in the Bible: V. 20

Jesus gives again the promise that he will come soon. The bride (see V. 17) answers with the prayer: “*Amen.*”<sup>113</sup> *Come, Lord Jesus!*” The bride waits longingly for her bridegroom. This should be our attitude; otherwise we have to examine the motives of our faith. We quote a song by  
25 Manfred Siebald: “*Come soon Lord Jesus – but not quite yet...*” The Christian is constantly in danger of being diverted from the true and essential by the lure of the world (compare for instance Mat 6:25-34; Col 3:1-4; 1Ti 6:7-10; 2Ti 4:10; Heb 11:24-26; 12:2 etc.).

## h.) The last blessing in the Bible: V. 21

Everything depends on his grace... Compare this wish of blessing with that of Paul at the end of  
30 some of his letters: Rom 16:24; 1Co 16:23; 2Co 13:13; Gal 6:18 etc.

35 *Amen. Come Lord Jesus Christ!*

---

<sup>113</sup> Translated from the Hebrew: “*certainly*”, “*so be it*” or similar.

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## Table of contents

	<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>A.</b>	<b>Date of Writing and Author of Revelation .....</b>	<b>3</b>
10	1.	General .....	3
	2.	Authorship and time of writing of Revelation .....	3
	a.)	Revelation – written by the apostle John during the reign of Nero .....	3
	b.)	Revelation – written towards the end of the 1 <sup>st</sup> century by a bishop (or elder) with the name of John .....	3
	c.)	Revelation – written by the apostle John towards the end of the 1 <sup>st</sup> century .....	4
	<b>B.</b>	<b>The Canonicity of Revelation .....</b>	<b>4</b>
15	<b>C.</b>	<b>Different methods of exposition .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	1.	The <i>allegorical</i> approach .....	4
	2.	The <i>preterit</i> approach .....	5
	3.	The <i>present</i> or <i>historic continuous</i> approach .....	5
	4.	The <i>futuristic</i> approach .....	5
20	<b>D.</b>	<b>The goal of the book .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>E.</b>	<b>The person of Christ in Revelation .....</b>	<b>7</b>
	1.	Christ in his Humanity .....	7
	2.	Christ in his Divinity .....	7
	3.	Christ in his work of Salvation .....	7
25	4.	Christ in his Return .....	7
	5.	Christ as Judge .....	8
	6.	Christ and his Church .....	8
	7.	Christ in his relationship to the World .....	8
	<b>F.</b>	<b>Key-word and key-verse of Revelation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
30	<b>G.</b>	<b>The Beatitudes in Revelation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>H.</b>	<b>The “7” in Revelation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>I.</b>	<b>Parallels between Genesis and Revelation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>J.</b>	<b>The Structure of the Book .....</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>II.</b>	<b>COMMENTARY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
35	<b>A.</b>	<b>What you have seen: Prologue and Christophany: Chapter 1 .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	1.	Prologue: Vv 1-3 .....	11
	2.	Greetings to the seven churches in Asia Minor: Vv 4-8 .....	11
	3.	The vision of the Son of Man (Christophany): Vv 9-20 .....	12
40	a.)	The Situation of John: Vv 9-10a .....	12
	b.)	The Christophany: Vv 10b-16 .....	13
	c.)	The Lord’s command to John: Vv 17-20 .....	14
	<b>B.</b>	<b>Present: The Church and the seven Letters: Chapters 2–3 .....</b>	<b>14</b>
	1.	Letter to the church of Ephesus: Chapter 2:1-7 .....	15
	2.	Letter to the church of Smyrna: Chapter 2:8-11 .....	16
45	3.	Letter to the church of Pergamum: Chapter 2:12-17 .....	17
	4.	Letter to the church of Thyatira: Chapter 2:18-29 .....	18
	5.	Letter to the church of Sardis: Chapter 3:1-6 .....	19
	6.	Letter to the church of Philadelphia: Chapter 3:7-13 .....	20
	7.	Letter to the church of Laodicea: Chapter 3:14-22 .....	21
50	<b>C.</b>	<b>Future: what must take place after this: Ch. 4–22 .....</b>	<b>22</b>

5	1.	The throne of God in heaven: Chapters 4–5.....	22
	a.)	The throne of God and his entourage: Chapter 4.....	23
	b.)	The Lamb and the sealed book: Chapter 5 .....	24
	(1)	The book with the seven seals which only the Lamb can open: Vv 1-7 .....	24
	(2)	Praise to the glory of the Lamb: Vv 8-14.....	25
10	2.	The great tribulation on earth: Chapters 6–19.....	25
	a.)	The first six seals: Chapter 6 .....	28
	(1)	Opening of the first seal: Chapter 6:1-2.....	28
	(2)	Opening of the second seal: Chapter 6:3-4 .....	29
	(3)	Opening of the third seal: Chapter 6:5-6.....	29
15	(4)	Opening of the fourth seal: Chapter 6:7-8.....	29
	(5)	Opening of the fifth seal: Chapter 6:9-11 .....	29
	(6)	Opening of the sixth seal: Chapter 6:12-17.....	30
	b.)	The first parenthesis: Chapter 7.....	30
	(1)	The 144'000 with the seal of God: Vv 1-8 .....	30
20	(2)	The great multitude in heaven: Vv 9-17 .....	32
	c.)	From the seventh seal to the sixth trumpet: Chapters 8–9.....	33
	(1)	Opening of the seventh seal: Chapter 8:1 .....	33
	(2)	The seven angels with the seven trumpets: Chapter 8:2-6 .....	33
25	(3)	The first trumpet: Chapter 8:7.....	34
	(4)	The second trumpet: Chapter 8:8-9.....	34
	(5)	The third trumpet: Chapter 8:10-11 .....	34
	(6)	The fourth trumpet: Chapter 8:12-13 .....	34
	(7)	The fifth trumpet: Chapter 9:1-12 .....	34
	(8)	The sixth trumpet: Chapter 9:13-21 .....	35
30	d.)	The second parenthesis: Chapter 10:1–11:14.....	36
	(1)	The angel with the little scroll: Chapter 10.....	36
	(2)	The temple and its measurements: Chapter 11:1-2 .....	37
	(3)	The two witnesses: Chapter 11:3-14.....	38
35	e.)	The seventh trumpet: Chapter 11:15-19.....	39
	f.)	The third parenthesis: Chapters 12–14.....	40
	(1)	The first 4 persons: the woman, the dragon, the boy-child and Michael: Ch. 12.....	40
	(2)	The 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> person: the Antichrist and the False Prophet: Chapter 13 .....	42
	(3)	The seventh person: the Lamb with the redeemed: Chapter 14:1-5 .....	46
40	(4)	The three angels who announce judgement: Chapter 14:6-13 .....	47
	(5)	The harvest and the gathering of grapes: Chapter 14:14-20 .....	47
	g.)	The seven bowls: Chapters 15–16.....	48
	(1)	The seven angels with the seven bowls: Chapter 15 .....	48
	(2)	The seven bowls of the wrath of God are poured out: Chapter 16.....	49
45	h.)	The judgement of Babylon: Chapters 17–18.....	52
	(1)	The system of the prostitute Babylon: Chapter 17:1-6 .....	52
	(2)	The mystery of the prostitute Babylon revealed: Chapter 17:7-14 .....	55
	(3)	The fall of Babylon: Chapter 17:15-18.....	57
	(4)	Description of the prostitute Babylon and her fall: Chapter 18 .....	57
50	i.)	The return of Christ: Chapter 19 .....	58
	(1)	The wedding supper of the Lamb: Vv 1-10 .....	58
	(2)	Christ shall return to this earth: Vv 11-21.....	60
	3.	The millennium and the last judgement: Chapter 20.....	62
	a.)	The millennium: Vv 1-6.....	62
	(1)	Satan bound for a 1000 years: Vv 1-3.....	62
55	(2)	The kingdom of a thousand years: Vv 4-6.....	63
	b.)	Satan finally judged: Vv 7-10 .....	69
	c.)	The white throne – judgement of unbelievers: Vv 11-15.....	70
	d.)	Eternal condemnation, annihilation or salvation of all? .....	72
60	4.	New creation and eternal state: Chapters 21:1–22:5 .....	73
	a.)	New heaven, new earth and a New Jerusalem: Chapter 21:1-8 .....	74
	b.)	Description of the New Jerusalem: Chapters 21:9–22:5 .....	75
	(1)	The holy city coming down from heaven: Chapter 21:9-11 .....	75
	(2)	Description of the city and the life within: Chapters 21:12–22:5 .....	75
65	5.	Epilogue: Chapter 22:6-21 .....	78
	a.)	Confirmation of the prophecy through an angel: Vv 6-9 .....	78
	b.)	The command not to seal the book: Vv 10-11 .....	78
	c.)	The last promise in the Bible: Vv 7.12.20.....	78

5	d.)	The last revelations in the Bible: Vv 13-16.....	78
	e.)	The last invitation in the Bible: V. 17 .....	79
	f.)	The last warning in the Bible: Vv 18-19 .....	79
	g.)	The last prayer in the Bible: V. 20 .....	79
	h.)	The last blessing in the Bible: V. 21 .....	79
10	<b>III.</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>80</b>

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